Beijing +5 - Declarations and Reservations

10 June 2000

Afghanistan

It is with bitter regret that I make this statement on behalf of the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Unlike most other representatives who have spoken on behalf of their countries, I have no encouraging information on progress made in the advancement of women and in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of 15 September 1995. The war imposed on the Afghan people by our neighbour to the south has in fact had a tragic impact on the civilian population, in particular on women and children. We believe that world conferences offer Member States a gathering place where they can undertake joint initiatives to resolve their common problems. That is why we take this opportunity to explain to the Assembly, which has met in special session to discuss gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century, the problems of Afghan women and girls in that part of the territory of Afghanistan which is under the occupation of mercenaries known as the Taliban, who have been recruited and sent to my country by Inter-Services Intelligence, the Pakistani secret service agency. Ever since the arrival of the Taliban in the territories which they and their extremist and obscurantist allies now occupy, women have been deprived of their right to work. Ever-deepening poverty prevails in a growing number of urban families, especially in Kabul, where, since September 1996, over 40,000 working widows have lost their employment, by which they earned the livings with which they supported their families. *Mr. Stanislaus (Grenada), Vice-President, took the Chair*. Violence is rampant against women under the occupation of the Taliban extremist mercenaries. Widespread and systematic restrictions, tantamount to discrimination, have been imposed on women and girls in these areas through policies enacted by decree. These policies are implemented by the notorious so-called Ministry for the Prevention of Vice and the Promotion of Virtue. According to many witnesses, restrictions have been imposed against women through cruel, degrading and inhuman punishment. Some women have even been publicly beaten by Taliban guards for having left their homes without being accompanied by a male family member. Medical care is also restricted for women. Another negative aspect of the occupation of Afghan territory by the Taliban mercenaries is the prohibition of education for women and girls. Dozens of elementary and high schools for girls have been closed by the Taliban. It should be noted that Afghanistan launched public education for girls in the 1920s. In 1937, the establishment of the first girls' high school in Kabul was followed by others. In the cities and semi-urban areas of Afghanistan, progress was being made in women's education, as in other Muslim countries throughout the world. Armed conflict inflicts particular suffering on women and children. The current situation of women in Afghanistan clearly illustrates that fact. In the forced displacement of the Afghan population by the Taliban in July 1999, over two thirds of refugees were women and children. Displaced girls were victims of "marriages" forced upon them by the Taliban. Women were separated from the men of their own families. All of these barbaric acts perpetrated by the Taliban have been reported by human rights organizations, including Mr. Kamal Hossain, the

Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the situation of human rights in Afghanistan. We are firmly convinced that the present crisis in Afghanistan, imposed by Pakistan for hegemonic purposes, should be condemned by the international community. Pakistan must end its support for and sending of extremist mercenaries who, for the most part, are from misogynist political groups that do not belong to the present and which do not follow the true tenets of the holy religion of Islam. Foreign military forces and the so-called volunteer fighters sent to Afghanistan by Pakistan must immediately leave Afghanistan. Afghans should be allowed to resolve their own problems by peaceful means under the auspices of the United Nations. With a view to strengthening solidarity throughout the world with Afghan women, we appeal to the international community to put pressure on the Pakistani military junta to stop waging this expansionist war in Afghanistan. The Afghan people, like all peoples of the world, have a right to live in peace. The human rights of women and children can be respected only in a peaceful and secure situation. **32 A/S-23/PV.10** Respect for human rights, including the rights of women and girls, should be an essential component of the peace agreement between the parties and must be part of any future arrangement. I must point out that girls' schools and high schools are still open in the free zones in the north-east part of Afghanistan, areas that are administered by the Islamic State of Afghanistan. Since February 2000, there has been a women's association working for the advancement of the status of women, whose members are teachers in girls' schools. In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that in order to ensure the advancement and the empowerment of women throughout the world, political will and the commitments undertaken are essential for gender equality, development and peace to become realities. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides a legal framework which can be used for the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Algeria

Allow me at the outset to convey to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic our condolences on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. He was a great Arab leader who played an important and unparalleled role at the international and national levels. History will record President Al-Assad's steadfastness in defence of causes of justice and truth. On this occasion, I wish, on behalf of the Algerian delegation and of the Arabic Group, to convey our heartfelt condolences to the delegation, people and Government of Syria. We pray to the Almighty that his soul may rest in peace. It is to God that we all return. Allow me also, on behalf of the Arabic Group, to express to you, Sir, our thanks and gratitude for the adoption of the outcome document following lengthy but fruitful efforts. I take this opportunity to express our thanks, particularly to the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, the coordinators and facilitators of the working group and the members of the Bureau, who have all striven tirelessly to achieve these satisfactory results. All delegations have participated effectively and positively on this path. We are confident that, as we enter the third millennium, this document will constitute a new basis for the improvement of the conditions of women and the advancement of their rights and status. During the negotiations, Arab countries demonstrated a spirit of cooperation and flexibility. In this

Assembly, they wish once again to confirm their readiness to defend the rights of women and to protect all their achievements of recent years. Finally, on behalf of the Arab Group, my delegation conveys its thanks to all the members of the United Nations Secretariat, particularly Ms. Angela King and including the interpreters, translators and **15 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** those who work behind the scenes, as well as to the non-governmental organizations, which have played a very positive role in this historic achievement.

Argentina

On behalf of the delegations of the member countries of the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR) — Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay — and the associated countries of Bolivia and Chile, I wish to inform the Assembly that on the occasion of the holding of this important gathering in the context of the theme "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", these six delegations have undertaken a commitment to continue to develop a common agenda on women's issues. I will provide the Secretariat with the text of that agenda, with the request of the six delegations that it be made part of the official documents of the special session. I should like to express again our condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic for the tremendous loss they have suffered through the passing of President Al-Assad. I should also like to tell you, Mr. President, how deeply grateful we are to you for the way in which you have conducted the special session. The same goes for the other members of the Bureau, and in particular to the entire Secretariat staff, who have made possible, through enormous dedication and effort, the results we have so far been able to achieve.

Bahrain (Friday Session)

It is an honour for me to represent my country, Bahrain, at this important international gathering — the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". I should like to convey to all present the regards of His Highness Prince Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa, Prince of the State of Bahrain, and his wish for the successful outcome of this session, with a view to promoting the prosperity and well-being of the peoples of the world. I am pleased also to convey the gratitude and appreciation of Bahrain to the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his initiative to hold this special session and for the attention that has been given by the United Nations under his tenure to issues related to women and their role in the contemporary world. The continued work of the international community over five decades has achieved an international consensus on reasserting the right of women to development and their integration in all international, regional and national economic and social activities. The last few decades have witnessed the holding of a series of world conferences aimed at promoting the role of women in achieving comprehensive and sustainable development, beginning in Mexico in 1975 and through Copenhagen in 1980 and Nairobi in 1985. The

holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 under the slogan "Equality, development and peace", which this special session has **24 A/S-23/PV.10** been convened to review, was an important world event and a turning point of great significance to international efforts to advance the status of women. It focused on the role of women in development in its work, Declaration and Platform for Action, in a manner that made it clear that there can be no development without the effective participation of women and that sustainable development can be achieved only through the improved economic and social status of women. That call was reiterated at various international conferences, focusing on the importance of investing in individuals and on their health, training and education, and on elaborating programmes of work to enable women to participate and contribute fully and effectively to development. All of these ongoing efforts have promoted the role of women and have led to the recognition that their problems are part and parcel of the problems of society as a whole; that finding a solution to the problems of women cannot be done in isolation, without dealing with the problems of society in general; and that humankind cannot perform at its best without the participation of women. It has become very clear that genuine progress and development can be achieved only through the effective participation of women on an equal footing with men in all areas. In conformity with this comprehensive vision, many charters and international declarations have been issued that promote the ideals of equality, fairness, equal opportunity and non-discrimination between men and women and that have opened new horizons for the greater participation of women in the comprehensive development of all societies. Five years after the holding of the Beijing Conference, we believe that now is the time for a careful review of women's issues in the light of the great changes our world has witnessed. Those changes — which include globalization, trade liberalization and the restructuring of communications and information technologies — make it clear that there are new challenges confronting the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Those challenges urgently require a greater awareness of the role of women in the advancement of society as a whole and in full partnership with men. There is also an urgent need to expand cooperation between Governments, non-governmental organizations and the private sector in order to implement the Platform for Action and to establish the necessary mechanisms and the national constitutional arrangements for follow-up on the achievements of the Platform and promote the central role of women in raising future generations to be prepared to deal with those challenges. This should be done without regard to regional, economic or national characteristics, the religious, cultural and historic backgrounds of States, or the cultural, economic or political regimes they may adopt. As a developing State, Bahrain long ago realized the importance of the role of women in the development of society, and has made great efforts to improve the economic and social status of women within society to open up new opportunities for them to participate and to secure their present and prepare for their future. This position has been fully reflected in the government programme of 1999, in which women's issues took their appropriate place. The programme reasserted the fact that the role of women should not be limited only to promoting all aspects of development, but that it should extend to shaping the future and determining the direction of efforts on behalf of all society. The women of Bahrain made new gains when it was declared that they would be able to participate in the next session of the consultative council. The lofty place accorded women in the State of Bahrain was also reflected in our

1973 Constitution, which pays great attention to the family as the basis of society in order to strengthen society and protect its religious and moral values while also protecting mothers and children. This was also reasserted through various laws that have given women full rights on the basis of Shariah law and its high moral and religious values. The national report on the status of women in Bahrain has been submitted to the special session and includes statistics underscoring the great progress achieved by Bahrain in the implementation of the 12 basic areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Platform for Action, whose review we are here to undertake, was based on women's full participation in all efforts to develop society. We hope that the final document of this session will represent the beginning of a new era in helping developing countries implement their development policies, secure their social and economic progress and create a better future for coming generations. **25 A/S-23/PV.10** Finally, I would like to thank the Assembly for its attention and I wish all of you every success in this meeting.

Bahrain (Saturday Session)

At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its heartfelt condolences to the people and Government of the Syrian Arab Republic at the passing of the great leader, President Hafez Al-Assad. May his soul rest in peace. May his bereaved family and people be rewarded with endurance and long life. In brief, my delegation wishes to express its determination to implement the provisions of the document before us in a manner that does not contradict national sovereignty or national legislation, and particularly, the tenets of Islamic shariah. My delegation would like this statement to be reflected in the official records of this meeting.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

I join the previous speakers in congratulating Mr. Gurirab on his assumption of the presidency of the General Assembly at this important session. It is my great honour to address this special session on behalf of my delegation. As one of the countries participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, Bosnia and Herzegovina, along with the rest of the world community, expressed full commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action adopted by the Conference. Although my country was in the midst of conflict in September of 1995, today we can still assess gains made during the past five years. Only a few months after the adoption of the Beijing Declaration, the Dayton Peace Agreement was brokered. As was the common practice during the peace agreement negotiations, not a single woman participated on either side of the negotiation table. It was only recently that we began to address the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, due to the end of the war and the post-conflict rebuilding of society. As the first step, the Beijing Declaration has been translated into the languages of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has enabled wider distribution and outreach of the document and its principles. Today in Bosnia and Herzegovina women hold 29 per cent of the seats in the

house of representatives, which places Bosnia and Herzegovina at the top of the scale regarding the participation of women in parliament. Here I recognize the positive role played by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in implementing the Rules of the Temporary Electoral Commission, which called for one third of the candidates nominated to be female and introduced the requirement that three of the first ten candidates on election lists have to be women. Only a few years earlier, in 1996 and 1997, women held 2 per cent and 5 per cent, respectively, of the seats in the house of representatives. However, women are underrepresented at all other levels in government bodies. In coordination with the OSCE Department for Democratization, women in parliaments have initiated the establishment of permanent commissions within the parliaments to manage the issues of the promotion of the status of women, implementation of the Platform for Action and the launching of the initiative for creating conditions for the establishment of government services. With all these goals in mind, the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has recently opened the Centre for Gender Equality. Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina make up 40 per cent of the workforce. The unemployment rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina is high at 40 per cent, and 40 per cent of the unemployed are women. In Bosnia and Herzegovina girls have the same access to education as boys. Slightly more male students enrol in university, but slightly more female students graduate from university. Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina have fed their families when there was no food. Women have taken their babies for vaccination when leaving the safety of their basement shelter was a mortal danger. Women have educated their children when they could not reach schools. Women from Srebrenica are still searching for approximately 10,000 missing fathers, brothers, husbands and other members of their families. Women stand as the true heroes of the society in Bosnia and Herzegovina — our grandmothers, mothers and **33 A/S-23/PV.10** daughters; Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish and other nationalities. Never again should rape as a weapon of war go unpunished. The International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia has recognized rape as a crime against humanity, and the Statute of the International Criminal Court has designated physical abuse of women a crime against humanity. The delegation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court played a unique and significant role in including, for the first time, gender-based crimes in the Statute. The Council of Europe, in cooperation with the United Nations Office for Human Rights and other partners, organized a conference in Bosnia and Herzegovina entitled “Trafficking in Human Beings for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation”. The conference shed light on the scope of the placement of women and girls in appalling conditions of slavery and servitude. We, the Governments, have to work together to identify and to protect victims. Rather than prosecuting the victims, we must instead prosecute the traffickers. We have to commit ourselves to undertaking all action necessary to combat that transnational crime and to understand the causes of trafficking such as economic impoverishment and disruption of social norms, both consequences of societies in transition. Bosnia and Herzegovina fully supports the work of the Ad Hoc Committee for preparation of the two protocols to the convention against transnational organized crime, hoping that these important instruments will soon be finalized. Full implementation of the human rights of women and of the girl child, as an integral part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, must be encapsulated into gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development at all levels, that will

foster the empowerment and advancement of women. Tireless international efforts and the work of local non-governmental organizations to achieve gender equality have played a significant part in empowering women. In recent years the determination of civil society and of the non-governmental organization community in my country have helped to provide women with counselling, support and protection. A domestic violence information hotline has also been set up. We believe that gender focus is more than just an ideological and moral issue. In our view, the common ground needed for progress is the promotion of the status of women in order to ensure full equality. This will also further enhance society as a whole, regardless of ethnicity, culture or religion. The full realization of women's rights is not a gender issue but a human issue. Women and girl children represent the most vulnerable sector of society, and it must be our common objective to ensure an empowering environment based on full rights for all women.

Cameroon

I would like to thank the President for giving my delegation the opportunity **14 A/S-23/PV.10** to make a statement during this very important special session of the United Nations General Assembly on the theme "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". Taking the floor for the first time, the delegation of Cameroon under my leadership would like to congratulate the President and wish him even greater success, and the guidance of God, for the rest of his mandate. The Beijing Platform for Action has been implemented under a macroeconomic context characterized by a severe economic and financial crisis which has affected my country for more than half a decade. As a result, the Cameroon Government was obliged to reduce expenditures in social sectors. This has led to the deterioration of the living conditions of most Cameroonians, including women. There is no doubt that the Cameroon Government has the requisite political will and is committed to the advancement of women. This political will was reaffirmed by the adoption in 1999 of a national policy declaration on the integration of women in development. The general objective of this policy is to create a national framework for the implementation of the priority areas defined in the Beijing Platform for Action. Permit me to review eight critical areas of this Platform, and to look at what has been achieved by the Government of Cameroon so far. In order to implement the recommendations related to the critical area of women and poverty alleviation, income-generating opportunities for women have been identified in the following sectors: agriculture, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture, environment, medicinal plants, horticulture, trade, the informal sector, handicrafts, tourism and textiles. In 1998, a national strategy declaration against poverty was published, with a special plan of action to fight poverty among women. A national survey using a participatory approach has just been carried out. Its objective was to determine the principal causes of poverty among the women of Cameroon. The Government has strengthened and increased the number of technical organs for the promotion of socio-economic activities for women. As a result, more and more women are getting involved in income generating activities, including home economics, food production, cassava processing, the informal sector, trading, tourism, and so on. Credit schemes are being developed at the grass-roots level to help

women finance their income-generating activities. On education and training, special attention has been paid to advocacy and social marketing vis-à-vis parents and cultural and religious leaders. The aim is to create public awareness about the need to treat boys and girls equitably when it comes to schooling. As a result, girls' enrollment in primary school has gone up. With respect to non-formal education, the literacy rate of adult women has also improved. Turning to the issue of women and health, government policies and strategies following the Beijing Conference have created a strong public awareness of the need to tackle women's health problems. Several health and nutrition surveys have been carried out to show the scope of these problems. Sensitization campaigns have been carried out on violence against women and the girl child, and information has been circulated to the public with respect to the consequences of violence against women. On the question of women in power and decisionmaking positions, the democratization of public life has attracted a large number of women into politics. Today, many women are members of several political parties. In the ruling party, 23 per cent of posts of responsibility are held by women. In the parliament and the local councils, women represent 5.5 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. There are four women members of the Government and two secretaries general of ministries. The private sector is also improving the situation with respect to women in decision-making positions. Turning to institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women, the Government of Cameroon has shown its commitment to the advancement of women through the creation of strong administrative and technical institutions at the central, intermediary and community levels. At the central level, there is the Ministry of Women's Affairs, with branches at the provincial, divisional and subdivisional levels. Technical organs, including women's empowerment centres and appropriate technology centres, have been created for the training and capacity-building of women at the grass-roots level. In addition to this government institutional framework, there are networks of organizations, female professional associations and **15 A/S-23/PV.10** non-governmental organizations working for women's rights and education, against violence and discrimination, and for the socio-economic advancement of women. On women's human rights, Cameroon has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Relevant policies have been formulated to promote the human rights of the Cameroonian woman. A national committee has been set up and a plan of action has been developed to review all laws which discriminate against women. With respect to the girl child, our national policy emphasizes the elimination of all forms of discrimination and detrimental cultural practices against the girl child, including sexual mutilation and exploitation. On women and environment, efforts have been made to create awareness on the role of women in the sustainable exploitation of environmental and biological resources and on the need to prevent pollution and keep the environment clean. As members can see, my country has made significant efforts for the advancement of Cameroonian women, despite a macroeconomic context characterized by economic crisis and an unsustainable debt burden. The Government has created an enabling environment for the promotion of women, as a result of which our society is gradually becoming more and more gender-conscious and gender-sensitive. The mainstreaming of gender issues in major sectors of national life has become a priority, and gender mainstreaming is gaining ground in many national development programmes and projects. *Mr. Morel (Seychelles), Vice-President, took the Chair.* From 1995 to date, some progress has been made, though

not without significant difficulties, and although a lot is yet to be done. The major obstacle encountered by my country in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has been the lack of financial resources. A substantial amount of money which could have been allocated to projects for the promotion of women has been used to service the heavy debt Cameroon owes to international creditors. Other obstacles have been encountered with respect to poverty alleviation, education, health, power and decision-making positions, women's rights, gender mainstreaming and women and environment. My delegation has noted that, besides these obstacles, new trends, issues and concerns have emerged, which need to be addressed if the goals of equality, development and peace are to be attained for all in this new millennium. Let me cite but a few: globalization and new information technologies; the role of women in the promotion of peace; the spread of HIV/AIDS, especially among adolescents; trafficking in children and the exploitation of the girl child; persistent poverty among women; the deterioration of women's health; and the need for women's involvement in the promotion of their national culture and moral values for sustainable development. Those obstacles, together with the emerging issues, concerns and new trends of which I spoke earlier, are to us a timely signal that, although appreciable ground has been covered in our efforts to advance women, a lot more needs to be done. The head of State of Cameroon, His Excellency President Paul Biya, has made the substantial reduction of poverty and the improvement of the living conditions of the vulnerable groups, especially women, the cornerstone of his presidential mandate. In that perspective, my delegation hopes that Cameroon will benefit from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative so as to enable the Government to fulfil its commitments, in collaboration and sustainable partnership with other friendly Governments, international organizations, the United Nations system, traditional and religious leaders, non-governmental organizations and, above all, with men and women themselves. In that way we could hope to make a significant contribution to gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century.

Canada

Canada would like to convey its sincere sorrow on the passing of President Al-Assad, and to convey our condolences to his family and to his people. For the past week our negotiators have been working exhausting hours to develop language and a document that is action-oriented and makes gains on Beijing. For this, we are in their debt. Canada is pleased to join in the consensus that the document before us reflects on the issues which most Member States believe are important to achieving equality for the world's women. Canada brought to the **18 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** table many issues which we feel would improve, *de jure* and de facto, the lives of women and girls, not only in our country, but also in many countries of the developing world. We are therefore pleased to see some of these issues adopted here today and reflected in this document. We note that we have made no gains from Beijing on the inherent right of the person to make decisions about her sexual and reproductive life. The Cairo+5 Conference drew important conclusions in the area of sexual and reproductive rights. Canada remains strongly committed to the principles established by those Conferences. However, Canada is pleased

that the document reaffirms and reinforces women's rights as human rights and that there is censure for the abhorrent practice of trafficking in women and girls and an acknowledgement of the compounding role played by new communications technology in this regard. Canada is also pleased that there is renewed commitment to enhance the relationship between government, non-governmental organizations and civil society at the national and international levels, since we believe that this is essential to the development of practical and effective strategies for the de facto equality of women. We are especially pleased that there has been expanded support for non-governmental organization programmes on race and ethnically based violence. Our world is diverse. The inequality of women's lives in developed and developing countries demands recognition of diversity of race, religion, class, sexual orientation, age, mental and physical disabilities, and ethnic, indigenous, immigrant and refugee status. Paragraph 2 *bis* recognizes the discrimination that women may experience and the violation of their human rights on a number of these grounds, and underlines the responsibilities of government and the international community to take the necessary steps to prevent and/or remedy such discrimination. However, we note that the paragraph makes no specific reference to sexual orientation. Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is a violation of human rights. This principle is established in Canadian law. On the international level, sexual orientation is included as a prohibited ground of discrimination set out in a number of binding international human rights instruments, either on the grounds of sex or on the grounds of other status. The United Nations Human Rights Commission and other parts of the United Nations human rights system have upheld this position. Given this, we regret that the document fails to include a more explicit reflection of this principle. However, Canada considers that the matter of sexual orientation is encompassed in the reference to "other status" in paragraph 2 *bis*. In sum, Canada considers paragraph 2 *bis* to constitute an unqualified condemnation of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Finally, given that women and their children are the most frequent victims of landmines, given the strong statement of concern in Beijing five years ago, and given the progress made since then, as well as the signature of the Ottawa Treaty, Canada is puzzled and disappointed that there is no reference to landmines in this, a document which is meant to protect women and children. In conclusion, notwithstanding these reservations, Canada recognizes this document as a move forward towards equality for women in the world, since we believe gender equality to be essential to the world's future economic, social and democratic development and to peace and human security.

Central African Republic

We are meeting here today, five years after Beijing, to assess together, mid-way, the efforts made towards implementing the commitments undertaken to improve the status of women. This assessment, which is a real tribute to the United Nations, was necessary to appreciate the position women hold in each of our States. However, Madam President, before doing that, on behalf of the delegation of the Central African Republic, I wish to extend to you and to the members of the Bureau warm congratulations on your election. The special qualities of the President will ensure the success of our work, and he

can be assured that he has my delegation's full cooperation to that end. I also bring wishes for the success of the special session expressed by the President and head of State of the Central African Republic, His Excellency Ange-Félix Patassé, and Madame Angele Patassé whose faith in the ideals of the United Nations remains unshakeable. It is a pleasure for me to renew to the Secretary- General of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, who recently granted us the honour of visiting us in the Central African Republic, our country's great appreciation for what he is doing for peace and development in the world and particularly my country, through the presence in the Central African Republic of the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA), now represented by the Bureau of the United Nations in the Central African Republic, BONUCA. The Government of the Central African Republic participated actively in the Beijing Conference and subscribed to the resolutions and recommendations adopted during that important meeting. Like other States of the world, the Central African Republic committed itself to adopting the concrete measures necessary to put them into action. Before giving a comprehensive survey of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action in the Central African Republic, I first wish to carry out a noble duty and express, on behalf of my Government, my profound thanks and sincere gratitude to the international community, which reacted so quickly to halt the vortex of civil war, which began in my country in 1966. **10 A/S-23/PV.10** The Beijing Platform for Action was implemented in the Central African Republic within a particularly difficult social, political and economic context, marked by three rebellions by part of the army during 1996 and 1997, difficulties associated with signature of the agreement with the Bretton Woods institutions and the general spread of poverty throughout the population, especially women. After the Beijing Conference, the Government first began to strengthen institutional machinery for promoting the status of women. This was translated into decentralization of the Ministry in charge of women's matters in regional offices, strengthening the technical capacity and decentralization of the National Body for Dialogue for the Promotion of Women, the consultative body for coordinating all actions for women in the national territory. The strengthening of these institutional machineries should be continued in the short term by structuring and reconverting the National Body for Dialogue to a national council for coordination and dialogue for the promotion of women to link it with the Cabinet. This council will involve the highest officials of the State: the President of the Republic and the Cabinet. It will also involve the representatives of all the ministerial high-level departments, nongovernmental organization representatives and the programme directors of United Nations agencies. It is intended to strengthen the technical capacities of non-governmental organizations in their areas of intervention in order to maximize opportunities for success in the implementation of the national policy on the promotion of the status of women. Indeed, since the Beijing summit, and under the impetus of the National Body for Dialogue, there has been growing awareness among Central African women regarding their status, primarily through the improvement of their living conditions and their considerable input into the struggle against poverty in their country. This awareness has been translated into the establishment of more than 200 non-governmental organizations and women's associations which intervene in all areas of social life. These non-governmental organizations are today very active, but, unfortunately, they are confronted with the enormous difficulty of financing their activities, a problem to which the Government cannot respond effectively in view of the cash-flow problems that it

has experienced over the past few years. For that reason, I would like to use this rostrum to ask my country's development partners, and more particularly women's non-governmental organizations of the developed countries, to lend a strong hand to their sisters in Central Africa, so that they can fully assume their roles not only in Central Africa but throughout the world, as women are the actors and the promoters of sustainable human development. Once this prerequisite was put into effect, the Government redefined the national policy on the promotion of women on the basis of the Beijing Platform for Action, integrating new national realities. Twelve new priorities were thus retained. In terms of the protection of women and their participation in decision-making, I should point to the acceleration and adoption of the family code, the law which was promulgated in 1998. Access by Central African women to decision-making posts is still far from the 30 per cent proportion recommended by the United Nations. However, a clear advance of women in the national political sphere is noticeable and can be seen in the number of women deputies in the National Assembly, which increased from 3 out of 85 for the period 1993 to 1998 to 8 out of 109 for the period of 1999 to 2004. This increase is due to the large numbers of women joining political parties following intensive consciousness-raising. There are also three women in the Government. The question of peace deserves particular attention. I would also ask those present to take measures towards securing the firm commitment of the international community to act on the deep-rooted causes of conflicts, because there can be no development without peace. In this regard, I would like to point out that the involvement of women has been noticeable in the settlement of conflicts which resulted from rebellions, through their associative structures. In the health field, many studies explain the reasons which make women vulnerable: the arduousness of their tasks, lack of control over their sexuality and over reproduction, a sterility rate which has risen to 26 per cent, malnutrition, insufficient basic health services, and traditional practices which are deleterious to their health — all crowned by the insufficient access by women to health services because they lack the means to pay the costs. **11 A/S-23/PV.10** This concern has led us to include health, not only as the Government's first priority, but also as the second priority of our national policy on the promotion of the status of women. Accordingly, particular attention has been devoted to maternal and child health; family planning; the combat against practices that are harmful to women and girls, and against violence directed at them; and the reproductive and sexual health of women and girls. In terms of violence, the women of the Central African Republic are the victims on a daily basis of traditional practices that are harmful to their health. This violence takes several forms: female genital mutilation; early marriage and pregnancy; poor treatment in the family or domestic violence; persecution of widows; assault and battery; rape; and sexual harassment. These acts, which are socioculturally sanctioned, are committed openly and freely, in blatant contravention of laws against them, and have even become socially acceptable. To tackle this situation, the Government established in 1996 a national committee to combat traditional practices that are harmful to the health of women and girls, and the violence against them. That committee is carrying out awareness-raising campaigns in areas where these acts are most prevalent. However, I should note that the Committee is limited in its activities by a significant lack of resources. Poverty, which is on the rise in the Central African Republic, affects many more women than men. For that reason, the national plan that is being elaborated to combat this scourge is placing particular emphasis on women. The economic underperformance of women will be

addressed through the promotion of training activities and the establishment of a microfinance system to support women's initiatives, because women contribute significantly to the gross national product. The educational system in the Central African Republic is not adapted to national realities. Teaching materials contain discriminatory stereotypes, and infrastructures and equipment are lacking. That is why I make an urgent appeal, from this lofty rostrum, to this special session of the United Nations for concrete and exceptional measures to be taken to help support the efforts of the Central African Republic to implement fully the Beijing Platform for Action.

Chad

It is with real pleasure that I am taking the floor on this solemn occasion of the holding of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly to express, on behalf of my head of State, His Excellency Idriss Deby, President of the Republic of Chad, of my delegation and on my own behalf, our most sincere and warm greetings. Allow me, also, to express, through you, Sir, my congratulations to the members of the Bureau who have been chosen to preside over these deliberations. Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to express, from this rostrum, the hope that the people, and particularly the women, of Chad, place in this special session which has brought together the sons and daughters of the entire world to assess the commitments undertaken by Governments in 1995 in Beijing during the World Conference on Women. This session is of special importance for us because of its subject, which deals with gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first **19 A/S-23/PV.10** century in the form of an assessment of the distance covered in the five years after Beijing. It is no secret that, until recently, my country, Chad, had been undergoing many troubles after independence. Since his accession to the supreme office in 1999, His Excellency President Idriss Deby has done his utmost to ensure that my country, Chad, can again take its place among nations as a State based on the rule of law, governed by democratic institutions. This approach has been characterized by several stages: the establishment of a multi-party system; the organization of a Sovereign National Conference; the liberation of the private press; and the adoption of the constitution of the Republic, which enshrines the principle of gender equality. Hence, all the conditions have been brought together, allowing the people of Chad to express themselves freely, thereby favouring dialogue rather than the language of arms. More recently, the Government adopted a draft law to ratify the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction. Despite all of these undeniable efforts, some forms of armed opposition remain in our country. That is why human development is, I hardly need recall, greatly conditioned by the absence of peace, which has a serious negative impact on people's living conditions and keeps them in extreme poverty. Women, who constitute 52 per cent of that population, are the principal victims. To this, we must add ignorance, illiteracy and a low rate of school enrolment for girls. With respect to the 12 priority areas set out in the Beijing Platform for Action, the Government of the Republic of Chad has established a multisectoral national programme of action and adopted a national policy for integrating women in development. This policy, enacted into law, aims at enhancing the legal status of

women; improving the living conditions of women; enhancing women's resources in all sectors; promoting women's economic status; and improving the institutional framework for the integration of women in development. The implementation of this programme has been undertaken through the following steps: the ratification and dissemination of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; the establishment of a technical body for the promotion of girls' education; the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the recent endorsement of a draft law on reproductive health; the integration of the gender concept and of education on family life into school programmes; the impending enactment of a draft code for the family; and the establishment, within the Ministry of Civil Service, Labour and Job Promotion, of an entity to monitor the participation of women in administration. As improving our people's living conditions is one of its priorities, the Government of the Republic of Chad, with the support of the agencies of the United Nations and certain African regional institutions, is preparing a broad poverty-reduction strategy. In the meantime, however, it has launched an important pilot project for reducing poverty and helping women, which is already under way. Along these lines, the Government has chosen to develop education and training for women with a view to encouraging their access to economic power. A national solidarity fund has been set up to that end. In the area of peace, the Government has closely involved civil society in the resolution of conflicts. In this respect, I would cite the establishment of a women's peace network; the establishment of a network of student ambassadors for peace; and the organization on 8 March 2000 of a day of prayer for a culture of peace, tolerance, love and forgiveness. With respect to promoting the status of women, noteworthy efforts have been made by the Government. Women have been nominated to high-level posts in the Government, diplomacy, central administration and territorial communities. Despite the Government's continuously reaffirmed political will, the progress achieved in the various areas remains weak with respect to female representation in decision-making bodies. The work ahead will be arduous, but we are convinced that the situation of women will markedly improve in the next five years on the basis of the efforts made by States and the new strategies to emerge from this special session. In conclusion, I wish to take this opportunity very sincerely to thank the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Development Programme, whose help has enabled many in our delegation to participate in these deliberations.

Colombia

On behalf of Colombia and the following Latin American countries — Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela — I wish to express sincere condolences to the delegation and people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the death of the President of the Republic, Hafez Al-Assad. We wish to make the following statement, which we request become part of the final records of this special session. In the context of the twenty-third special session of the United Nations General Assembly, "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", our delegations have brought

a shared, region-wide vision to the advances, challenges, lessons and good practices developed in the first five years since the Beijing Platform for Action began to be implemented. **11 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** The regional consensus enshrined in the Santiago and Lima documents have guided and strengthened the commitment by our respective Governments to move the Beijing review process forward, the reason for this special session. Approximately a year's work in this regard has highlighted a broad range of positions making up a complex context for achieving the consensus-based visions relating to the themes embodied in the Beijing Platform for Action. Our region, linked by common experience and the determination to attain the human rights of all women, adolescents and girls, makes progress through the implementation of the Platform for Action, incorporating it into the sovereign development policies of each country. We have especially emphasized the right to health, to participation and to development within a context of sexual and gender equality, free of violence. We reaffirm our commitment to creating the conditions that will make possible a fuller life for women with the exercise of the rights that they are entitled to, as citizens of this planet. This will lead in the context of our countries' sustainable development, to a society of women and men that is ever more humane, tolerant, healthy, productive and happy.

Cook Islands

I bring greetings on behalf of the Government and the people of the Cook Islands. We have prepared a formal paper on the Cook Islands situation regarding matters before this special session of the General Assembly. Given the time constraints, however, I would like to speak very briefly to the paper. As in many other countries attending this session, women in the Cook Islands traditionally played a role focusing on child-raising and domestic duties. Gradually, however, it came to be recognized that women were capable as well of making a broader contribution to the development of the country. They also had a right to do so. In fact, since approval of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies in 1985 and the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 in particular, the status of women in the Cook Islands in all the critical areas identified by the Strategy and Platform for Action has improved considerably. In 1995 the Cook Islands adopted its first National Policy on Women. That Policy clearly recognized: "... that women are an integral part of our nation. Their involvement in community and national development is most important. They must never be just passive observers. It is only proper that women should be equal partners with men in the development process of the Cook Islands." In these few minutes, I would like to concentrate on four areas in which progress has been noteworthy. First, regarding women and the environment, women have played a leading role in the protection of our fragile and vulnerable ecosystem in their push for the use of traditional marine conservation reserves known as the "raui" to contribute to an increase in the numbers of fish and shellfish available for present and future generations. These conservation reserves are not legislated, but are community-based and managed on the basis of trust and responsibility. Secondly, regarding violence against women, progress has been made with regard to the establishment of mechanisms of cooperation between **41 A/S-23/PV.10** Government and non-governmental

organizations. Government agencies have come to recognize that this is not a domestic problem that should be swept under the carpet to be sorted out between individual parties. Rather, it is a community problem. With the assistance of donor Governments, training of judiciary, health and police officials in appropriate ways to deal with this problem has been possible. The provision of victim support and assistance is also now readily available. Government is currently reviewing legislation related to sexual crimes. Thirdly, regarding women in power and decision-making, we have recently seen the election for the first time of two women to our 25-member Parliament and 9 women to local government. Four women have also been appointed to head important government agencies and ministries. Fourthly, with regard to women and the economy, since strict economic reforms were made in 1996, statistics collected indicate that exactly 50 per cent of small businesses started up with government assistance were done so by women. For the period from January to December 1999, total funds accessed by small businesses owned by women amounted to 77.8 per cent. This figure includes applications to commercial banks and international funding agencies and schemes. In trying to highlight the positive areas, we are ever mindful that much work still needs to be done in these and other areas, which include further support services, training and capacity-building for government officials and civil society to address the issue of violence against women, and domestic implementing legislation and training concerning the various agreements relating to women to which my Government is a party. Progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has been made possible by a close working partnership between Government and civil society, in particular non-governmental organizations. To conclude, my Government would like to reiterate its support for the strategy and Platform for Action and will renew its commitment to meeting its obligations. I would also like to lend our support to issues of concern to the Pacific Island countries, namely, the cessation of nuclear testing and the banning of hazardous wastes from our region. We would like this session to do two things: first, acknowledge the hard work done by us all to meet the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action; and secondly, call for renewed commitment from everyone here — the international and regional organizations, Governments and non-governmental organizations — to continuing to work towards achieving gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century. The Cook Islands Government looks forward to working closely with other members of the international community during and following this special session. May peace be upon us all.

Cuba

I should like at the outset to reiterate to the friendly delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, and, through it, to the brotherly people of that country our deepest condolences on the sad passing of their late President, Mr. Hafez Al-Assad. My delegation supports the points made by the delegation of Nigeria in its capacity as chairman of the Group of 77 and China. The delegation of Cuba wishes to express its great satisfaction with the common task we undertook during these days spent reviewing our achievements and assessing future obstacles and challenges as we seek to make real progress for women throughout the world. Although we have not yet seen or made an in-depth analysis of this document in

its entirety in its Spanish language version, we are certain that the balance that has been achieved will contribute in many ways to progress for women and girl children on every continent. We are grateful for the efforts made by all delegations that have worked hard here in the spirit of solidarity to adopt the most effective measures for the advancement of women. We note for the record that, in the negotiating process on the document we are to adopt today, in the course of which a hard-won consensus was achieved in the context of very informal negotiations on very specific and complex topics, a number of irregularities occasionally arose. As this special session comes to a close, my delegation wishes to state that, in such circumstances, the agreed language in certain **14 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** paragraphs reflects the great flexibility and commitment of Cuba to the advancement of women and the process we are finishing today. This reflects a contribution from my country and should not necessarily be construed as setting any precedent for future negotiating processes or later assessments of the results of other ongoing world conferences and summits. That is my delegation's understanding. Finally, we should like to congratulate Ms. Christine Kapalata, the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee for the special session, and all the members of her Bureau on their superb work. We also congratulate and thank Ms. Angela King and Ms. Yakin Ertürk for their efforts throughout these months. We also acknowledge the great contributions made by women's non-governmental organizations that were involved in these meetings. We have all worked with great dedication. Before us is a document that will allow us to assess how far we have come and the measures we have yet to adopt in order to achieve the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We are delighted to note that this has been worth our while and we congratulate everyone. My delegation also congratulates you, Mr. President, on your efforts and on the very positive way you have guided this special session.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Allow me first of all to carry out a very pleasant duty, that of warmly congratulating you and Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, President of the General Assembly, for the trust placed in you to chair this special session on the five-year evaluation of the Beijing+5 Platform for Action. I would also like to convey on behalf of the President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mr. Laurent- Désiré Kabila, the greetings of the Congolese people and, in particular, those of the Congolese women. The special session entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" provides the international community with the unique opportunity to meet and combine their efforts in order to reaffirm and ensure the implementation of commitments taken at the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, as well as the quest for solutions within the twelve priorities identified which remain major objectives to be achieved. My country places particular importance on the matter of equality between men and women. That is why in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, following the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, we have set up a national action programme which is based on the Beijing Platform for Action. This has made it possible to adopt measures that would ensure equality in women's participation in political, economic,

social and cultural life at the national and local level. We are convinced that this action plan is a great source of inspiration for the development of programmes and strategies to promote women, without negating our traditional and cultural values, taking into account our specific realities. **22 A/S-23/PV.10** The Sixth African Regional Conference in Addis Ababa in September of last year was, for my country, an opportunity to assess the implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms with respect to the 12 priority areas. This has made it possible to integrate in the three-year plan for the period from 1997 to 2000 the following objectives: to ensure the economic promotion of women through encouraging female entrepreneurism; to ensure the legal and cultural promotion of women through information on women's rights; to ensure the social promotion of women through training, the enhancement of female human capital, as well as the status of women; to improve the nutrition of women and children through the development of primary health-care programmes as well as the alleviation of women's daily workload; and to help women in rural areas through technical, material and financial means. With respect to these objectives, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has used the resolutions of the National Forum on Rights and Leadership of the Congolese Women held in September 1996, to develop the National Programme for the Promotion of Congolese Women. This five-year programme takes up the twelve critical areas of Beijing. From the point of view of strengthening the institutional mechanism for women, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo has set up a national council and provincial councils for women, which would be consultation bodies that are made up of experts who represent public institutions, nongovernmental organizations, unions, religious denominations, and delegates from the United Nations bodies, who take part as observers. Along the same lines, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has also begun the implementation of a national dialogue, follow-up and assessment mechanism to look at policies for promoting equality between men and women. It has also adapted national legislative texts to conform with ratified international instruments. However, there is still much work left to be done. Given the very difficult economic situation, which has been worsened by a war which is unfairly imposed on us, the efforts made by my Government for the implementation of the different programmes for women is not developing in the way that we wish. I would like to seize this opportunity to launch an urgent appeal to the international community so that they may improve their financial assistance to developing countries in order to create the proper conditions so that men, as well as women, can become further involved in the promotion of equal opportunity between men and women and to translate this into deeds. The important role that women play in the development process is clear to all and my delegation feels that the special session will offer an opportunity to assess the relevance of an idea contained in the Programme for Action which establishes a link between the promotion of women and economic and social progress in the world. We must all make a firm commitment in the quest for sustainable development to ensure women full participation in economic life and to effectively combat poverty primarily in the areas of education, in training and in health and to break with unacceptable habits which have led societies to neglect a part of their human resources. However, for many countries, inadequate means devoted to development, budgetary constraints and restrictions are still major obstacles delaying the achievement of the Beijing Programme for Action. We are convinced that an active partnership with all of the components of society, accompanied by solid cooperation, are

part of the solutions which could make our efforts successful. We cannot have equality or development if we do not have peace and justice. I should like to remind the international community of the aggression of which my country is a victim as a result of the coalition of armed forces of Rwanda, Uganda and Burundi, in flagrant violation of the Charter of the United Nations. I wish also to deplore the peculiar silence of some in the light of the serious human rights violations that are being perpetrated against women and children.

My country also deplores the absence of an explicit condemnation of the barbaric murders of 15 Congolese women, buried alive by Rwandan troops in the eastern part of my country. Do we have to reach a certain number of atrocities before they can be considered flagrant human rights violations? For us, each and every victim of this evil war — man, woman or child — is one death too many. The Democratic Republic of the Congo has always **23 A/S-23/PV.10** recognized the valuable contribution of women to the promotion of the ideals of peace and solidarity. That is why women must be involved in mechanisms for the prevention and settlement of conflicts, and their participation in peacekeeping operations must be strengthened so that they can make available to humankind their capacity for consensus-building, conflict resolution and peace-building. Furthermore, the international community must enhance its cooperation in the area of conflict prevention and peacekeeping, and ensure that awareness-raising measures are taken to sensitize people to the causes of violence that produce refugees and displaced persons, in particular women and children. Peace is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. How can we talk about the status of women and their access to decision-making posts, of improving their living conditions through quality health care and through education, or of their effective participation in sustainable development efforts at a time when the country is occupied by foreign aggressors — the Rwandans, Ugandans and Burundis. A large part of the population is in the forest, having fled the fighting, where women and girls suffer from malnutrition and are the victims of murder and rape, which leads to unwanted pregnancies and to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, since our aggressors come from neighbouring countries where there is a high incidence of HIV/AIDS. The spread of the AIDS virus represents a time bomb for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and nullifies the efforts made by the World Health Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Development Programme in the combat against the AIDS pandemic. Since 5 June last, the city of Kisangani has been the seat of bloody fighting between Rwandan and Ugandan soldiers, claiming more than 700 lives and injuring more than 100 among the Congolese civilian population. These unacceptable battles between two foreign armies on Congolese territory are continuing in the presence of the United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) and despite the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement. These atrocities have outraged the Congolese people and women in particular. In the light of the passive, even ambiguous attitude and the ongoing silence of the international community, Congolese women, through me, are calling on the international community once again and on those who are dedicated to the ideals of peace and justice to condemn this aggression, to force the aggressors to leave Congolese soil and return to their respective territories, so that the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo can continue with national reconstruction.

Egypt

On behalf of the delegation of Egypt, I wish to convey our condolences to the delegation, Government and people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing away of President Hafez Al-Assad. May his soul rest in peace. The delegation of Egypt would like to make the following observations. First, we thank all delegations for their cooperation and understanding, which has led to the successful outcome of this session and the adoption of a document that is a step forward after Beijing. The document represents the success of this session and complements the efforts of the international community to achieve progress for women, gender equality and to prevent discrimination against them. The Conferences held over the last 25 years, from Mexico to New York, have achieved a rapprochement and understanding **16 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** between different peoples and cultures. We hope that social issues, such as that of women, will not be used as a source of conflict between cultures and civilizations. We will not allow doubts to be cast on the goals and results of United Nations social Conferences, particularly the Conference on Population and Development. Secondly, Egypt will work hard to implement the document in line with our national policies and laws. Thirdly, Egypt regrets that the paragraphs concerning financial resources are very weak and not commensurate with the problems faced by women all over the world — particularly in developing countries — with regard to poverty, illiteracy and basic services. We hope that the international community and its institutions will work hard to increase the financial resources needed to empower women. Fourthly, we thank the non-governmental organizations for their efforts during the special session. We hope that their role will develop to allow for an exchange of experiences, and that it will not be limited to being present here to listen. Instead, we hope that it will develop in such a way as to lead the Secretariat and the specialized agencies to organize other meetings to exchange experience between official delegations and non-governmental organizations. That will lead to exchanges of practical experience at the national level, which will in turn result in understanding language that may be the cause of some misunderstanding. If the efforts of non-governmental organizations at the United Nations were to continue, the Secretariat should take into consideration rules and regulations in line with the norms of the Organization. The delegation of Egypt asked for the holding of a parallel conference with non-governmental organizations during the Cairo conference. We hope that the United Nations will make use of the role of non-governmental organizations in a very organized manner and in an improved environment that will lead to understanding. In conclusion, the delegation of Egypt would like to thank the members of the Bureau for their efforts, especially Ms. Christine Kapalata of the United Republic of Tanzania, Ms. Kirsten Mla□ak of Canada and Mr. Asith Bhattacharjee of India. At the risk of omitting some names, I must mention also Ms. Patricia Flor, Ms. Mónica Martínez and others, along with the Chairmen and other officers of the working groups and negotiating groups. I also thank Ms. Angela King and the other members of the staff of the Division for the Advancement of Women. Finally, I thank the Secretary-General for his support of our efforts at this session.

El Salvador

First of all, I should like, on behalf of the delegation of El Salvador, to express our condolences to the people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the death of President Hafez Al-Assad. Secondly, we express our appreciation to all of those who have deployed great efforts and acted in the highest spirit of solidarity in working towards the positive outcome we have achieved at this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, devoted to reviewing the implementation of the commitments taken at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women and to reaching agreement on fresh actions and initiatives to speed up its full implementation to achieve full gender equality, development and peace. El Salvador joins the consensus on the adoption of the final document of this review conference, and it reaffirms its full readiness to make a reality of the commitments designed to improve the status of women and enable them to exercise their rights. We thus reaffirm our support for the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. At the same time, however, we would like to make the following statement and request also that it be included in the final document of this session. With regard to the paragraphs that refer to the issue of abortion and related issues, the delegation of El Salvador would like to place on record that in line with our Constitution, abortion is not permitted under any circumstances, as article I of that Constitution recognizes the human person as such from the moment of conception. Reproductive health and family planning services are provided to adolescents with the consent of the parents or legal guardians, but they must never lead to abortion. Let us recall here that at the International Conference on Population and Development, held at Cairo in 1994, the delegation of El Salvador brought forward the relevant reservations with regard to abortion as well as to reproductive health and family planning services.

Gabon

As Chairman of the African Group, and on behalf of the Gabonese delegation, I would like to convey my deep condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad, who played an important role on the international scene, particularly in the Middle East. The African Group will take the opportunity to express its sympathy to the sisterly people of Syria again when the General Assembly pays formal tribute. We support the declaration made by Nigeria on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Mr. President, allow me to congratulate you and all the members of the Bureau on the manner in which you have conducted the work of this special session. We also congratulate the members of the Preparatory Committee and of the Secretariat who have done their utmost to provide all the necessary elements for us to conduct our work smoothly, even though there were **10 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** some problems with translation in the other official languages. Throughout our work Africa has made every effort to carry out its responsibilities in order to reach a successful end to this Conference. New York is a turning point for Governments, non-governmental organizations and civil society to become conscious of the need for the promotion of women in the overall development policy of each country — a turning point because we have once again

reaffirmed our support for the Beijing Platform for Action and for the Declaration of the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development. Consequently, we have overcome our differences and seen our common interests. Consensus has contributed greatly to this success in our work. However, sovereignty still rules, bearing in mind the political, cultural, economic and social concepts of each country. We have to show, more than ever before, that all members of society — men, women and children — can contribute more effectively to the building of their nations. Women the world over are the keepers of moral values in society. They can only accept this role fully in symbiosis with men. We ask our development partners to provide the necessary resources for the application of international programmes to which we have subscribed. However, we express our regret that the final document has not been translated into all the working languages of the United Nations.

Holy See (Friday Session)

The Holy See delegation has participated actively in the negotiations leading to this special session of the General Assembly, a session which has raised issues of critical importance to the lives of millions of women worldwide, and which has been evaluating the progress that has been made since the Fourth World Conference on Women. The living heart of the initiatives called for in the Beijing Platform for Action corresponds to the multiplicity of services the Catholic Church has historically provided to women, demonstrating in action as well as in words its belief in the importance of educating girls and women and of access for women to education and the basic social services which they need to pursue their own lives and family goals. The Platform's sections on the needs of women in poverty, on ending violence against women and on education, employment, land, capital and technology coincide with the Church's own mission, since they begin to speak of the hope which Pope John Paul II has eloquently summed up in his exhortation to "be not afraid". But, Mr. Acting President, the truth is that I am afraid, as are many of my sisters throughout the world. As a wife and mother, I, and my delegation, fear for the health and well-being of children in Africa, where the continued prevalence of diseases like malaria, guinea worm diseases, schistosomiasis, along with the growing HIV/AIDS pandemic, fells so many of our children. We worry about the number of people, especially the children, who suffer from malnutrition in a world with so much food. The Holy See is extremely concerned about the growing conflicts and the people who find themselves torn from their homes and families by war and senseless turmoil. As a mother of children, I and my delegation, are greatly worried about those who cannot read or write and who continue to be enslaved by ignorance and a lack of knowledge in a world that seems to thrive on technology and information. For these reasons, my delegation strongly supports the document's provisions condemning all forms of violence against women, upholding women's rights to economic and political empowerment, its measures against poverty, and its references — brief though they are — to high mortality rates among girls and women, due both to chronic illness and to widespread infections, including tropical diseases. My delegation is particularly pleased to see in the final document a clear acknowledgement of the need of all women for access to basic social services, including education, clean water, adequate

nutrition and safe sanitation. However, in the end, the "Women 2000" document, like the Beijing Platform, would emphasize, seemingly endlessly, one issue — sexual and reproductive health — to the detriment of a holistic view of the health of women and their families, which is so desperately needed to alleviate women's fears. This special session has given us an opportunity, not only to evaluate the past, but also to plan for the future; and my delegation and I must ask if we have accomplished all that we set out to do. We live in a changing world in which many people are afraid and in which many people have lost hope. The international community must work intensely to calm those fears through the effective actions of the United Nations. For all of us to cease to be afraid, we must proceed with full and complete human development — not only social and economic, but also spiritual. The Holy See renews its pledge to help find an end to hunger, to find a way towards educational opportunities for all, towards remedy and comfort for the suffering caused by sickness and disease, and through these means to continually seek to extinguish the fear that keeps us from celebrating life as the gift that it is. **39 A/S-23/PV.10** "Be not afraid" is not an empty phrase; it is a message that needs to be concretized by doing all that we can to lead every woman and her family to the threshold of hope. In conclusion, the Holy See delegation wishes to state that nothing that the Holy See has done in the "Women 2000" process should be understood as an endorsement of concepts it does not support for moral reasons. Nothing is to be understood to imply that the Holy See endorses abortion or has in any way changed its moral position concerning abortion or contraceptives. The Holy See reaffirms its belief that life begins at conception and that every human life must be protected from the earliest moments to the end of the life cycle.

Holy See (Saturday Session)

The Holy See wishes to offer the most sincere condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as to the Syrian people, as they mourn the death of President Al-Assad. We join with all the people who pray for his peaceful rest. The Holy See takes note of the progress that has been made in these past few months in the preparatory process for this special session and cannot but praise the efforts of the international community to advance the condition of women in the world. The delegation of the Holy See has worked in a constructive way, in a spirit of goodwill, to make this outcome document more responsive to women. In this regard, the delegation is pleased with many of the document's provisions, in particular those condemning all forms of violence against women, those upholding women's rights to economic and political empowerment and those which outline measures to eliminate poverty and to provide all women with access to basic social services. However, my delegation has not failed to point out some serious concerns regarding this review process. From the outset, my delegation has constantly reiterated its compliance with the guidelines set out in General Assembly resolution 54/142 that "the special session will be undertaken on the basis of and with full respect for the Platform for Action and that there will be no renegotiation of **23 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** the existing agreements contained therein". (*General Assembly resolution 54/142, para. 6*) As such, it has not escaped the attention of this delegation that many other delegations

have not followed these guidelines. In this regard, my delegation is gravely concerned with the persistent attempts by some delegations to introduce new and undefined terms, including “sexual rights” and “sexual orientation”, which can be interpreted to include paedophilia, among other things. These attempts demonstrated a blatant disregard of the General Assembly resolution and consistently obstructed and delayed the entire review process. The Holy See was able to join with serious reservations in the consensus on the Platform for Action adopted at the Beijing Conference. The Holy See continues to hold these reservations. Nothing that the Holy See has done in this process should be understood or interpreted as an endorsement of the concepts it cannot support for moral reasons. Especially, nothing is to be understood to imply that the Holy See endorses abortion or has in any way challenged or changed its moral position concerning abortion, contraceptives or sterilization. The intention of the Holy See is to welcome this consensus decision of the special session and, accordingly, offer its statement of interpretation. I would ask that the text of this statement, which includes the official position of the Holy See as follows, be included in the report of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The Holy See, in conformity with its nature and its particular mission, by welcoming the adoption of the final document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled “Further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action”, wishes to express its understanding of it. First, the document remains marked by an individualistic and relativistic understanding of sexuality. Second, regarding the terms “sexual health”, “reproductive health” and “sexual and reproductive health”, the Holy See considers these terms as applying to a holistic concept of health which embraces the person in the entirety of his or her personality, mind and body and which fosters the achievement of personal maturity and sexuality in the mutual love and decision-making that characterize the conjugal relationship in accordance with moral norms. The Holy See does not consider abortion or access to abortion as a dimension of these terms, nor does the Holy See endorse any form of legislation which gives legal recognition to abortion. Third, with reference to the terms “contraception”, “family planning” and “reproductive rights” and any other term regarding family planning services and regulation of fertility, the Holy See’s welcoming the consensus decision should in no way be interpreted as constituting a change in its well-known position concerning these family planning methods, which the Catholic Church considers morally unacceptable, or on family planning services which do not respect the liberty of the spouses’ human dignity and the human rights of those concerned. Fourth, with reference to all international agreements, in particular to any existing agreements mentioned in this document, the Holy See reserves its position in this regard, consistent with the Holy See’s acceptance or non-acceptance of them. Fifth, with regard to the term “gender”, the Holy See reserves its position with the understanding that this is grounded in biological sexual identity — that is, the two sexes, male and female. Sixth, the Holy See reaffirms that the education of young people — including children, girls, adolescents, young women and young men — including education on sexual and reproductive health, is primarily and fundamentally the right, duty and responsibilities of parents, in accordance with paragraph 3 of article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. Seventh, with regard to the access of young people, including children, girls, adolescents, young women and young men, to family planning services and sexual and reproductive health services, the Holy See

considers this to mean married couples and the individual men and women who constitute a couple. In this, the Holy See wishes to give emphasis to the particular aspect of mutual love and decision-making that characterize the marital relationship. **24 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** The Holy See maintains that nothing in the outcome document or in other documents referenced therein is to be interpreted as requiring any health professional or health facility to perform, cooperate with, refer or arrange for services to which they have objections on the basis of religious belief or moral or ethical conviction. With respect to paragraphs 9 and 107 (i) of the unedited outcome document, the Holy See affirms that human life begins at the moment of conception and that life must be defended and protected. The Holy See can never condone abortion or policies that favour abortion. The Holy See further affirms that the right of conscience of health-service providers is assured by, inter alia, article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Holy See asks that this be noted in the proper place in the renumbering of the formal document. The Holy See requests that this statement of interpretation be included verbatim in the final report of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Honduras

The delegation of the Republic of Honduras reaffirms its satisfaction with the manner in which this session has been conducted and expresses to the delegation, the people and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic its deep condolences at the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. We also reaffirm our intention to accept and support the provisions adopted at this Conference, joining the consensus of the various delegations gathered here. Our Government and President Carlos Flores have the following reservations, which should be fully incorporated into the final report of this Conference. Our reservations are based on the fact that we are a signatory to the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights and on article 65 of the Constitution of the Republic, as well as article 12 of the children's and adolescents' code, which guarantee the right to life from the moment of conception, on the basis of the moral, ethical, religious and cultural principles that must govern the human community and in accordance with internationally recognized human rights. **3 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** Articles 111 and 112 of the Constitution stipulate that the State must protect the institution of matrimony, the family, maternity and childhood. Therefore, Honduras accepts the concept of family planning, reproductive health, risk-free maternity, regulation of fertility and reproductive and sexual rights, when they do not include abortion or the interruption of pregnancy as arbitrary actions, since Honduras does not accept them as methods of regulating fertility or of birth control, being contrary to the morals and good traditions that are the basis of our legislation. New language, terminology and concepts introduced into the document merit greater analysis to reflect their precise meaning, free of interpretations that undermine respect for the human person, morals and good traditions; the delegation of Honduras can accept such terminology only when it does not undermine its national legislation. At the same time, we affirm that actions to promote the status of women and their involvement in political, social and economic development must be carried out in such a way as not to endanger

protection of the family, maternity and the rights of parents to educate their children, as guaranteed by our legislation.

Indonesia (Friday Session)

It is a great honour and privilege for me to join you here today in this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. As a developing country contending with formidable social, economic and political challenges, Indonesia has not found it an easy task to translate the global concepts of women's rights and gender equality into practical country-level strategies; nor has it been easy to replicate the best practices from all over the world in promoting the welfare of women. Nevertheless, we have been greatly inspired by the strong commitment of the international community to fulfil the Beijing Platform for Action and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, as well as by the current efforts to mainstream the gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system. In 1999, Indonesia's People's Assembly adopted its new broad State policy guidelines that, inter alia, identify gender equality and gender justice as one of our national development objectives. Moreover, Indonesia's newly reconstituted State Ministry for Women's Empowerment has conducted an internal reorganization and policy review, which has resulted in far-reaching changes on how the Ministry defines and carries out its mission. We are now drafting presidential instructions in order to affirm the joint roles and responsibilities for gender mainstreaming. In order to obtain nationwide support in our quest for gender mainstreaming, bureaux of women's empowerment have been established in 14 out of 27 provincial government offices. There are 89 centres for women's studies located all over the country. Moreover, there are numerous institutions to end violence against women and promote women's human rights, such as the National Commission on Human Rights, the National Commission on the Protection of Children and the National Commission on Violence against Women. In November 1999, Indonesia strengthened its commitment to the objective of eliminating violence against women as a key barrier to gender equality. At that time, the State Minister for Women's **6 A/S-23/PV.10** Empowerment officially announced a joint State and Community Proclamation to Eliminate Violence Against Women. A Government and civil society partnership has developed a national action plan based on a "zero tolerance" policy. In February of this year, Indonesia signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The Government is now also reviewing from a gender perspective all of Indonesia's laws and regulations to identify those that discriminate against women. A large array of Indonesian women's nongovernmental organizations, women's rights groups and human rights organizations have played an important role as partners and supporters for the harmonization of amendments of laws, policies and programmes with a view to bringing them into line with the Women's Convention, the Beijing Platform and the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies. The financial crisis has had a profound impact on the quality of life of all Indonesians, and on women in particular. A national survey in 1998 showed that the problem was compounded by the fact that 12.95 per cent of Indonesian families are headed by women, a majority of whom are divorced or widowed and work outside the

home. Studies reveal that a disproportionately high number of families among the poor are headed by women and that childcare in such families is inadequate, thereby adversely affecting the growth and development of children, especially girls. The economic crisis has also increased maternal mortality rates and the incidence of poverty among women, as well as drug abuse. Indonesia is carrying out various programmes in response to these challenges. One of those programmes is the strengthening and revitalization of community service centres, called POSYANDU. There are over 200,000 POSYANDU spread out in urban and rural areas. POSYANDU basically provide integrated services for health, nutrition, family planning and activities aimed at generating income for women as part of the poverty alleviation strategy. As I am also the Chairperson of the National Family Planning Coordinating Board, I intend to launch a social education campaign to further reduce maternal and infant mortality and to help prevent the spread of sexual transmitted infections, including HIV/AIDS, through promoting a more active role of husbands in reproductive health. Marriage at an early age is still common in many parts of the country and exposes the girl child to health risks. It also stands in the way of her attaining the education that will provide the knowledge and skills necessary to empower her and enable her to improve her life. It is therefore essential that social and cultural barriers to the proper education of women and girls, including the widespread practice of early-age marriage, be eliminated. The Government is also endeavouring to uphold the human rights of women in the workplace. Having ratified all of the core conventions of the International Labour Organization, including Convention No. 182 on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour, Indonesia is embarking on a programme to reform the labour laws. Furthermore, Indonesia is committed to reversing the negative effects of the crisis on women and to removing entrenched barriers preventing their full participation in political life and economic development. We are also taking immediate and vigorous action to stop ruthless practices, such as trafficking in women and children, child prostitution and pornography. We are pleased to note that prominent women's and human rights non-governmental organizations at the national and international levels have extended their support and assistance to Indonesian women migrant workers. We hope that more countries and nongovernmental organizations can join together to give women migrant workers a safe and dignified life and working environment. In our common noble endeavour to improve and promote the rights of women and children, we in Indonesia have a long way to go and, undoubtedly, international support and cooperation are needed. Nevertheless, Indonesia remains committed to helping women and children realize their full human rights and an enhanced quality of life. To realize gender equality, equity and justice, we pledge our readiness to work together with all members of the international community in enhancing the status of women everywhere for the well-being of all of humankind.

Indonesia (Saturday Session)

In my capacity as Chairman of the Group of Asian States for the month of June, I wish to express our deepest condolences to, and solidarity with, the Government and people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the sad demise of President Hafez Al-Assad. We respected

President Hafez Al-Assad highly as a man who, for three decades, fought to build a strong and proud nation and to deliver his people to their rightful destiny. President Hafez Al-Assad contributed meaningfully to international politics, especially in the Middle East. On behalf of the delegation of Indonesia, I should like also to express my sincere appreciation to you, Mr. President, and to congratulate the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, Ms. Christine Kapalata, all the members of the Bureau, and Ms. Angela King and all United Nations staff. I also commend the active and productive participation of the non-governmental organizations, which contributed to the success of our negotiations leading to the adoption of the important outcome document before us, which will empower women and promote their rights as well as promote gender equality, development and peace. It is indeed a great accomplishment, and it is due to our relentless efforts to reaffirm our commitment to the advancement of women in all spheres.
My delegation reiterates our readiness to work together with all members of the international community in enhancing the status of women everywhere for the well-being of all humankind.

Iraq

At the outset, my delegation wishes to express its support for the statement of the representative of Algeria, made on behalf of the Arab Group. We express our sincere condolences to the Syrian delegation on the demise of President Hafez Al-Assad. May he rest in peace. We also express our full solidarity with the Syrian people in these circumstances. Syria's tragedy is our collective tragedy. My delegation also expresses its appreciation for the efforts made by the presidency of the Preparatory Committee, as well as by the members of the Bureau, the Secretariat, the contact and working groups and all facilitators, to arrive at the document before us. My delegation demonstrated maximum flexibility in order to reach a balanced and consensus document. My Government will respect its provisions and implement it in accordance with our national laws and the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution. My delegation, which participated in all the efforts to arrive at this document, through consultations held at all stages and levels, has joined the consensus in its adoption. However, we have reservations regarding interpretation of the document — namely, any provisions that might run counter to Islamic shariah and its provisions, as well as to the tenets of the Islamic religion and Arab values and traditions. My delegation hopes that this statement will be reflected in the documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly.

Islamic Republic of Iran

At the outset, I would like to express, on behalf of my Government and people of the Islamic Republic of Iran, our heartfelt condolences and sincere sympathy to the people and Government of the Syrian Arab Republic, on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. The loss of President Al-Assad will be greatly felt in our region and beyond. Allow me to take

this opportunity to express, on behalf of the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, our sincere thanks and appreciation to you, Mr. President, for successfully leading this special session of the General Assembly and to the Chairpersons of the Preparatory Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, as well as the delegation of Nigeria, as the Chairman of the Group of 77, and the Chairpersons of the working and contact groups, for their excellent work in steering the long and difficult negotiations towards final consensus. While joining this valuable consensus on the final outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, on Women 2000, supporting its implementation at both the national and international levels and emphasizing the sincere desire and resolve of the Islamic Republic of Iran to realize the goals set out in the final document, I would like to comment and register our reservations on the following points. On the concept of equality, we are of the view that both men and women are valuable components of humanity, each possessing equally their respective characteristics and potential for intellectual, social, cultural and political development, which are complementary and mutually reinforcing. On the basis of this perspective, which is derived from the Islamic lofty values and beliefs, we interpret the concept of equality as embodied in the respective provisions of the outcome document. As consistently underlined on numerous occasions by the delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, including in our national statement before this special session on 7 June 2000, the centrality of family, as the basic unit of society, should be accorded commensurate attention. Accordingly, we consider the provisions pertaining to family to be of high magnitude, and believe that a more constructive approach on this crucial concept should have been made in the final document. On matters relating to sexuality and sexual behaviour, particularly paragraph 8 of the unedited final outcome document and the relevant part of paragraph 107 g, I would like to dissociate my delegation from any provision in the text that may encourage, explicitly or otherwise, sexual relations outside the framework of marriage and the family, as defined exclusively as the legitimate union between men and women. The Islamic Republic of Iran upholds the principle that safe and responsible sexual relationships between men and women can only be legitimized within the framework of marriage. With respect to the issue of inheritance, the Islamic Republic of Iran interprets the relevant provisions of the final document in accordance with the principles of Islam. Moreover, we would like to underline that we will consider any new concepts and terminology not included in the Beijing final outcome document in accordance with Islamic precepts and values and our Constitution. The Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of the final outcome of this review conference, with the objective of promoting respect for women's rights, elevating their status in a real sense, facilitating and institutionalizing their empowerment and ensuring their meaningful participation in all aspects of social life. The delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran would like to request that its reservations, as enumerated above, be included in full in the report of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. The text of these reservations will be subsequently submitted to the secretariat of this session.

Jordan

I should like, on behalf of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, to express our heartfelt condolences to the brotherly delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing **21 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** of President Hafez Al-Assad. May God have mercy on him and grant his people and his bereaved family the strength to endure and persevere. I should like to use the opportunity of the closing of the twenty-third special session to thank all of those who endeavoured to make the negotiations a collective success. My delegation looks forward to the implementation of the recommendations of the outcome document in the hope that we can realize equality and fairness between the genders within the framework of our Jordanian Constitution, which consecrates and guarantees these rights.

Kenya

My delegation would like to express our heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the demise of their President, Mr. Hafez Al-Assad. Our delegation prays that God will give them comfort and peace in this difficult time. Through you, Mr. President, we wish to express our sincere confidence in and gratitude to the Preparatory Committee, chaired initially by Kenya and currently by our sister country Tanzania, and to the entire Bureau for the work that they have done to make this special session of the General Assembly on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" a landmark for women. I would like to commend the work done by the Group of 77 and China and the statement that was made under the chairmanship of Nigeria. My delegation joins the consensus in affirming the outcome document and will endeavour to implement it within the national framework. Our Government attaches special importance to the family as an important institution and a key factor in the socialization process of children and young people. It will be strengthened and protected, as universally understood. **13 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** May I end by saying that issues related to abortion are contained in the penal code of our country, where abortion is illegal. This sensitive issue will be addressed domestically within the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action. May I once again thank you, Mr. President, for the splendid work that has been done during this session.

Kuwait

At the outset, I wish to express our thanks to you, Mr. President, to the members of the Bureau and to all the Member States for their efforts to achieve success in this conference and to agree on the consensus document that is before us. I wish to reaffirm the commitment of the State of Kuwait to implement the document in a manner that does not contradict Islamic shariah or the Constitution of Kuwait. I also would like this statement to be reflected in the final document.

Libyan Arab Jamahiriya

The Libyan delegation wishes to express its heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic and to the Arab people of Syria on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad, the great leader, **12 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** whose tragic death has been a great loss to the Arab nation. May God bless his soul. My delegation participated effectively and on a continuous basis in the preparatory process for this session since its inception, with the aim of reaching an accurate, comprehensive document that will help achieve real equality between women and men and a better future for all women. It gives my delegation great pleasure to join this consensus. We wish to reaffirm that we will implement the document in accordance with national laws and in a manner that does not contradict Islam, its tenets and prevalent social and religious traditions. We would like this statement to be reflected in the report of the session.

Malta

At the outset, I join previous speakers in expressing on behalf of the Government and people of Malta heartfelt sympathies and condolences to the Government and people of the Syrian Arab Republic on the sad loss of President Al-Assad. Malta welcomes the progress achieved in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, and reiterates its commitment to the promotion of gender equality, development and peace, and the promotion and protection of women's human rights. In joining consensus on the outcome document of the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", the delegation of Malta would like to reaffirm its reservation made to the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on the use of such terms as "reproductive health", reproductive rights", "sexual rights", "circumstances in which abortion is not against the law", "such abortions should be safe", and with respect to those sections of the document that directly or indirectly relate to induced abortion. The interpretation given by Malta is consistent with its national legislation, which considers that termination of pregnancy through induced abortion is illegal. The delegation of Malta further reaffirms its reserved position on those parts of the document wherein reference is made to the outcome documents of particular conferences. In this respect, the delegation of Malta reaffirms its reservations as contained in the reports of the respective conferences. Furthermore, the delegation of Malta reaffirms its reserved position on the use of the wording "international human rights instruments and United Nations consensus documents" wherever used in the outcome document with its previous acceptance or non-acceptance of them. It is requested that these reservations be recorded in the report of the special session.

Marshall Islands

On behalf of my delegation, I wish to convey greetings from the President, the Government and the peoples of the Republic of the Marshall Islands to this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender, equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". My delegation commends the organization of this special session. In 1995, at the historic Fourth World Conference on Women, held at Beijing, the Marshall Islands joined 187 other Member nations in adopting the Beijing Platform for Action for the advancement of women. The Conference recognized the numerous impediments to development facing women around the world and provided a sound basis for positive action for gender equality and for the social, economic and political empowerment of women worldwide. The Conference highlighted critical areas and factors inhibiting women's empowerment. Areas of focus included poverty alleviation; equality in education; health care; gender-based violence; armed conflicts; limited access to economic resources; women's marginal role in power-sharing and decision-making; and persistent discrimination against, and violation of the human rights of, women and the girl child. Five years later, women around the world still face many constraints, but we should never give up. We have much to gain from each other's experiences. Let us all move forward to further advance the Beijing + 5 agenda and to achieve the goals we all share, as called for by the Platform for Action. At the same time, let us all celebrate those achievements we have registered thus far; the light at the end of the tunnel is much brighter. Indeed, we want a world in full compliance with Beijing+5. As we begin the twenty-first century, our small island nation, along with all developing countries, is challenged by fragile economic and institutional structures which affect our lives and influence our actions. The inadequate representation of women in our Government, the paucity of employment opportunities for women, materialism and waste, alcoholism and abuse, the breakdown of the support structure from the extended family, and deteriorating traditional cultures and practices are among some of the other challenges facing us today. The Marshall Islands recognizes the important role and potential of women as an integral part of the overall development of the country, and respect for their social status has long been embedded in the traditions, cultural thinking and life of the peaceful people of this country. The active and equal participation of women in national development has never been alien to the people or the Government, and yet it is felt that programmes aimed at providing women with opportunities for education, involvement in the political process and in productive economic activities, and developing their cultural awareness are still inadequate and limited. Furthermore, the national Government recognizes that the increased and active involvement of women in the economic, political and social life of the country is most desirable and advantageous to the entire nation. In addition to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Government is seriously considering, in the not-too-distant future, acceding to the other human rights instruments, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, among other international legal instruments. As guaranteed under the Constitution of the Republic of the Marshall Islands, women and men have equal rights to vote and to seek and hold public office. We are experiencing an increase in the interest of women seeking public office, as evidenced in our national and local elections. We are also seeing more women in higher-level posts in the public service sector, as well as entering the private sector. The women of the Marshall Islands, in collaboration with our Government, non-governmental organizations, regional organizations,

international organizations and United Nations agencies, are committed to mainstreaming gender issues. With the adoption of our National Women's Policy, women's groups are active partners in the sustainable development programmes in our country. The Government has taken significant steps and measures to advance the status of women by formulating policies to involve women as equal partners at all levels, upgrading their skills and training to increase their employment opportunities, and to strengthen the coordination of women's activities. The formulation of the National Population and Development Policy; the National Youth Policy; the National Women's Policy; the Food, Nutrition and Agriculture Policy; and, finally, preparations for the revitalization and reorganization of the National Women's Council are all convincing indications of the Government's serious commitment to strengthen the role of women in nation-building and to protect their rights. To seal our commitment for the development of Marshallese women, a National Women's Convention is scheduled for September 2000, at which women from all over the Marshall Islands will review the National Women's Policy and map our course of action in the twenty-first century. I would like to invite the international community to join us in our endeavour. I would be remiss if I did not touch upon the essence of empowering women, and that is education. There is a well-known proverb which says, "If you educate a man, you educate a person, but if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family and, eventually, the whole world." Indeed, without a sound population and a base of educated women in the population workforce structure, no society can liberate itself economically, politically or socially. The Marshall Islands highly values education, and women are fortunate to have equal access to education and training opportunities. The promise of significant progress for women through the continued implementation of the Platform for Action can become a reality through genuine efforts by all stakeholders. This includes the commitment of new and additional resources from the international community, along with specific commitments by national and regional organizations and Governments. **35 A/S-23/PV.10** It is therefore the hope and expectation of the Government of the Marshall Islands that the international community will pledge the necessary financial and technical resources necessary to implement the Platform for Action and the further initiatives resulting from this Conference. In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge the assistance and contribution accorded to the Marshall Islands by our international development partners towards the advancement of women. The Marshall Islands remains committed to the Platform for Action, is prepared to meet the challenges outlined by this session and anticipates progress towards equity, development and peace.

Mauritania

I too would like to thank all of those who contributed to this session, making it a success. On behalf of my country, Mauritania, I express our heartfelt condolences to the people of the Syrian Arab Republic, our brotherly people, on the passing of His Excellency, President Hafez Al-Assad. I would also like to thank you, Mr. President, for the efforts you have made to crown our work with success, and to express our appreciation to the interpretation and translation services of the United Nations. On behalf of my country, I

call for more fairness and equality in the translation in all the working languages of the United Nations, particularly for Arabic and French. We believe that such equality would allow us to contribute more equally and fairly in our forthcoming work and make us feel that all countries and groups are treated equally in the United Nations. It would also support the equality we are calling for between men and women. On behalf of my delegation and my country I wish to reaffirm our commitment to make every effort possible to implement the outcome document of the Conference, provided that it does not run counter to our Constitution and national laws. I would like this statement to be included in the official records of the session.

Mauritius

On behalf of the Government and the people of the Republic of Mauritius, I wish to thank the United Nations for this special session of the General Assembly, which symbolizes the march that we women started in Beijing in 1995. Five years later, our march continues as we are gathered here to measure our progress, to learn from our mistakes as well as our successes and to chalk out our common future. My country signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and in 1995 at Beijing undertook strong commitments to which it has remained faithful. Thus gender equality has been integrated into our national legislation through the introduction of a Protection of Human Rights Act; amendments to the Civil Code to ensure strict equality between spouses in the administration of property and parental rights; amendments to the Criminal Code to make penalties against sexual abuse and family abandonment more severe and to establish sexual harassment as an offence; amendment of the Citizenship Act to give to the foreign spouse of a Mauritian woman the right to citizenship; and the introduction of a Protection from Domestic Violence Act. Institutional mechanisms have been strengthened for more effective service delivery and support to **2 A/S-23/PV.10** women. Mauritius has a full-fledged ministry for women headed by a cabinet minister. A National Women's Council functions as a coordinating body for women's associations. A Gender Bureau has been established to ensure the implementation of a gender management system based on the Commonwealth Secretariat's guidelines. A consultative mechanism, known as the National Advisory Committee on the Status of Women, comprised of non-governmental organizations, ministries, the United Nations Development Programme, the private sector and other stakeholders, provides critical inputs on gender policy. A national women entrepreneur council has been established by an act of Parliament to promote women entrepreneurship. Economic empowerment has been one of our main thrusts for action, as we believe that without the means of livelihood no woman can enjoy her rights fully. In 1998, within its poverty alleviation programme, the Government of Mauritius introduced a microcredit scheme based on the Grameen model of Bangladesh to provide loans to women without collateral for income-generating activities. Marketing being a serious impediment for women, a market centre provides a free marketing outlet, while a common facility centre offers training for skills development. In order to support working mothers, an early childhood development policy is being implemented for the training of childcare givers and

the establishment of childcare facilities in deprived areas. Violence against women and children is an unacceptable form of human exploitation. In 1997, the Government of Mauritius introduced the Protection from Domestic Violence Act, which has enabled thousands of silent women to break their silence and to benefit from legal protection. Structures for the provision of 24-hour service, free legal assistance and psychological counselling have been set up. One study has been conducted on the factors leading to domestic violence and another one on the criminological aspects of violence at home. Mauritius offers equality of opportunity and access to education, health, social services and employment, and there is no disparity in the enrolment rates of girls and boys. However, problems such as sexual exploitation have retained our attention, as they mostly affect the girl child. A study of the commercial sexual exploitation of children was conducted in 1997, followed by information, education and communication campaigns in high-risk areas. Child-watch network groups have been set up with the help of social workers and community-based associations for surveillance and early intervention. Women's access to information and technology has been improved, with new centres for women and families set up in under-served regions and the opening of an information technology centre exclusively for women. As far as political participation is concerned, despite some improvements since 1995, women's participation is still relatively low, with women comprising 7 per cent of the Parliament, 8.5 per cent at the municipal level and 2.8 per cent at the village level. Women make up less than 20 per cent of the senior managerial level in the public sector. Leadership training programmes are being conducted to encourage self-assertiveness and confidence-building among women. The National Gender Action Plan has also proposed that 30 per cent of seats be reserved for women. Preparing the National Gender Action Plan has been a gratifying experience. The Plan outlines our vision for the attainment of gender equality by the year 2005. It was formulated after wide consultations with all stakeholders, including women at the grass-roots level, and addresses health, human rights, human resources development and gender equality. As an immediate consequence, an engendering of the budget initiative has started, coupled with training and research programmes. Advancing the cause of gender equality is not without its difficulties. In addition to inadequate resources, the problems of shortage of specialized skills in gender planning and analysis, the lack of research and data on gender and the low priority accorded to gender equality objectives hinder our actions significantly. This special session of the General Assembly is a unique opportunity to reverse negative attitudes and to think of a new world order based on partnerships and participation within the country and beyond the national frontiers. We women have to develop a new sense of leadership and responsibility and to create a true culture of peace. We should not forget that we hold the keys to our own future. Therefore, we should not lose this special opportunity to shape a better vision for the future of women and for humanity.

Morocco (Friday Session)

I wish at the outset to convey to the Assembly the greetings and best wishes of His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco, who is following this **16 A/S-23/PV.10** special session of

the General Assembly with all due attention and interest. On behalf of the delegation of the Kingdom of Morocco, I congratulate the Republic of Namibia on the election of His Excellency Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab to the presidency of the Assembly at this special session, which is devoted to women at the dawn of the third millennium. The session is intended to marshal support for true gender equality, development and peace. We note with satisfaction that certain legitimate ambitions of women throughout the world are being attained, and this is due to the joint efforts of all; but women continue to suffer some setbacks. There are still areas, particularly in education and training, where the rates of school enrolment, illiteracy and scientific learning require more attention. Some major problems also persist in the area of health care, where the rate of infant and maternal mortality keeps increasing. Women are still suffering from physical and mental abuse caused by violence and by the spread of AIDS, whose devastating consequences, affecting women in particular and causing a growing number of orphans, is felt in all societies. We should recall here the great attention focused on this issue by our late sovereign His Majesty King Hassan II and the tremendous efforts he made regarding the promotion of women. These efforts are reflected in several major achievements, such as the consolidation of equality between the sexes in rights and duties, through incorporating many laws, particularly the civil status law; by respecting the political will manifested in the involvement of women in decision-making; by increasing their public and political participation; life management; by their integration within the representative institutions; and by becoming members of regional and national representative and executive bodies. For the first time in the history of Morocco, on 13 August 1997, women were appointed ministers, serving in the cabinet of that time, as well as in the present Government. Building on the legacy of his father, His Majesty King Mohamed VI gave women's issues utmost importance to ensure their promotion and to defend their rights. On the occasion of His Majesty's first speech since ascending to the throne, as he had done on many other occasions and in other initiatives, he stressed the importance of promoting women's conditions, legally, socially, economically and politically; and for the first time he appointed a woman as one of his counsellors, while he made the condition of women a top priority. His Majesty missed no opportunity to stress the increasingly important role played by Moroccan women in the modernization process. Morocco is also concerned with social aspects, because it is clear that respect for women's rights must become part of our common culture. The promotion of women occupies a special place in the objectives set by the educational institutions on all levels within the context of respect for human rights and the culture of peace. By decree of his Majesty the King, a universal strategy was elaborated placing women's issues at the centre of its policies. A permanent ministerial commission for women was established. The promotion of women was placed among the top priorities of the Five-Year Plan 1999-2003 for Economic and Social Development. Morocco also developed and sponsored programmes of education and training and consciousness-raising campaigns against violence towards women. Thus, the first national campaign to combat violence towards women was organized, and a partnership agreement was signed for the first time between the Ministry for Human Rights and the Moroccan Association of Lawyers, which counts among its objectives the support of women and girls in difficulty. In order to increase the rate of school enrolment among young girls, Morocco has made tremendous efforts. This is reflected in an increase in the educational segment of the budget and by the Parliament's adoption of the

application of laws for the implementation of the National Charter on education and training, which enforces compulsory education from 6 to 15 years of age. The Charter also stresses informal education and the creation of collective schools through partnership contracts between the private and public sectors. In this area, we have to pay tribute to Moroccan non-governmental organizations and to civil society for making notable efforts to improve the conditions of women and girls in our country. Globalization of the economy and new technology and information strategies have impeded the attainment of objectives, especially gender equality **17 A/S-23/PV.10** between men and women; this results from various political and economic disparities. How can third world countries participate in globalization and development when they are suffering from problems such as debt? The condition of women requires solidarity and coordination. That is what encouraged His Majesty to write off African debts to Morocco. We would like to make widespread this type of solidarity in favour of women. Morocco is proud to be one of those countries that promote the rule of law essential for the respect for human rights, and especially women's rights. In this regard, His Majesty the King committed himself to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action and devoted himself to ensuring the equality of the sexes, basing it on the teachings of Islam and Morocco's cultural particularities and the international Convention that Morocco has signed. The lofty objectives of this session are to strengthen women's rights and to find appropriate solutions to the many problems they face throughout the world. That is why we express our true hope for building a better future based on peace and equality between men and women, in order to guarantee equality between the sexes. We are aware of the enormity of the effort that is still required from all of us and the tremendous challenges of the future. We should all work together to put forth the most suitable ways to ensure women's dignity. Under His Majesty's leadership, Morocco reiterates its commitment to promote the consolidation of women's rights throughout the world, relying on its authentic civilization, renewed modernism, unique identity, its great religious and moral values, and its multicultural character.

Morocco (Saturday Session)

On behalf of its people and Government, the Kingdom of Morocco offers its heartfelt condolences to the people and Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. This is indeed a great loss. I wish to express the satisfaction and congratulations of the Moroccan delegation on the adoption of the outcome document. We followed the work of the Preparatory Committee with seriousness and great attention. Despite the difficulties in reaching consensus, the dialogue was very positive and constructive. Dialogue is the best way to achieve solidarity among the women of the world, and it led to this fruitful and useful result. The Kingdom of Morocco will be committed to the implementation of the document, in line with its Constitution, laws and national values. The document will certainly contribute to reinforcing the Government's efforts to improve the economic and social conditions of women. The national plan to integrate women in development projects, prepared by the Government with the full participation of civil society, is now being studied by a national committee headed by the Prime Minister. This is a strong indication of our sincere efforts on behalf of the cause of

women. No democracy or development can be achieved without women. Finally, we would like to thank the Secretary- General, you, Mr. President, the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee and the Chairpersons of the Working Groups, and all those others who contributed to the success of this session, serving the cause of women all over the world. We hope that the twentyfirst century will indeed be one of rights and effective equality between the two genders. My delegation would also like this statement to be reflected in the final records of the special session.

Nauru

I have the honour to speak today on behalf of SOPAC, the South Pacific Member States — Australia, Fiji, the Marshall Islands the Federated States of Micronesia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, the Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and my own country, Nauru — as well as on behalf of the observer States of the Pacific that are present at this meeting — Tuvalu and the Cook Islands. Our Governments welcome this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and the national commitments we made at Beijing. The South Pacific region, and women in the region, face unique challenges in achieving the goals of Beijing. The particular economic and environmental vulnerability of the island nations in the region influence strategies for achieving gender equality, peace and development. It is also a region of remarkable diversity of culture, history, language and geography. The challenges of responding to the needs of women and girls in diverse, dispersed and often isolated communities require innovative policies and programmes. The health and education of women and girls are of particular importance for the Pacific. Within the region there has long been recognition of the connection between the health and well-being of women and the overall economic and social growth and development of countries. Improving women's participation in in-house promotion, access to quality health care and reproductive and sexual health services continues to be a priority area for action in the region. Of particular concern are continued high rates of noncommunicable diseases, maternal deaths and related illnesses among women in most island countries. The basic health needs of women must be addressed if women are to contribute to their maximum potential at all levels, from the family to the region and beyond. Since the Fourth World Conference for Women, held at Beijing, one of the most alarming and devastating new trends has been the global AIDS epidemic. Urgent strategies, including to enhance **37 A/S-23/PV.10** international cooperation, must be adopted immediately to combat this growing epidemic. Education and recognition of the specific situation of women and girls must form an essential part of these strategies. A key achievement in the implementation of the Platform has been the growing recognition that violence against women is both a health and a human rights issue. The problem of domestic violence is one that many countries from our region have taken steps to address, particularly through education and public awareness to change attitudes surrounding domestic violence. There are also a number of successful community-based official development assistance projects addressing domestic violence, including many where services are delivered by non-governmental organizations. Men and women must be equal partners in contributing to

and benefiting from sustainable people-centred development. The minimum requirement to achieve this is equal access to basic needs, resources, services, education and training, taking into account the diverse circumstances of women, such as those of women with disabilities. The importance for all societies of the education of women and girls cannot be overstated. Education provides women with options and enables them to make choices. While the past five years have seen significant improvements in girls' access to formal education in the Pacific, the range of subjects of study available to girls remains limited. A particular challenge for the small island developing States of the Pacific is meeting the needs and aspirations of their young women as they seek further tertiary training and, eventually, employment. The environmental vulnerability of small island developing States, as well as their contribution to global sustainability, makes women's involvement in this area particularly important. Further strategies must be adopted to ensure that women participate fully in policy and decision-making on matters relating to their environment. There is a chronic lack of access to new and emerging technologies in the Pacific, and this is felt even more acutely by women. Since Beijing, new technologies such as the Internet have been identified as potentially powerful tools for empowering women. The Internet provides a powerful tool for women entrepreneurs in isolated areas such as the Pacific, enabling them to access hitherto unattainable markets for their products. There are already examples of this, including the export of coconut oils and soaps produced by a group of women in Samoa. The entrepreneurial skills of Pacific women are a key resource for the region. In particular, strategies that provide women entrepreneurs with credit and support have been particularly successful and have highlighted the positive impact of the full participation of women in economic life across a range of communities, as well as enabling them to harness the benefits of globalization. Since Beijing, increased attention has been paid to the impact of armed conflict on women and on girls. Conflict impedes progress towards full implementation of the Platform and places women and girls at particular risk of violations of their human rights. Increased participation of women and adherence to democratic principles are essential to conflict resolution and to post-conflict reconstruction. If we are to achieve our objective of gender equality, then we must put in place supportive domestic environments which protect the rights of women. Adherence to the principles of accountability, transparency and the rule of law promotes good governance when defining the interests of citizens and groups in society, including women. Effective and targeted development assistance can support the development of the strong institutional frameworks necessary for good governance. Respect for democratic institutions is a value shared by the countries in our group and lies at the heart of this. Since 1995, the Platform has been used by countries in the Pacific to guide national action towards empowering women and achieving their equality. Many countries have produced national action plans and have developed national machineries for women, including the establishment of government ministries dealing with women's affairs. The countries of the region recognize the need for cooperation at the regional level to assist Governments to implement and monitor the Platform and their respective national action plans. Gender mainstreaming has been an effective strategy for Pacific island countries in making progress since Beijing, and it must be supported. Further capacity-building at all levels, including in partnership with non-governmental organizations and United Nations agencies working in the region, is essential for implementing the Platform. In measuring progress for **38 A/S-**

23/PV.10 women in the region, the need for assistance and technical cooperation has been particularly highlighted. Sex-disaggregated data across all areas of society must be collected to ensure that policies and programmes are designed to address the specific needs of women within their families and their communities. Finally, our Governments also wish to acknowledge the significant contribution of nongovernmental organizations as partners in the implementation of the Platform. This spirit of partnership and teamwork, and our support for their participation in this review process, is evidenced by the significant number of non-governmental members on South Pacific delegations to this special session.

New Zealand

I would like to acknowledge the passing of President Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic and express New Zealand's condolences to the Syrian people. The New Zealand delegation is pleased that the final outcome document reflects the advances in women's equality that have occurred since the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. There is, however, still some way to go until full equality is reached. New Zealand will continue to make its contribution beyond Beijing+5. New Zealand acknowledges that some women face double and triple barriers to their full empowerment. New Zealand is committed to improving the status of its indigenous Maori women. New Zealand is one of a growing number of countries to prohibit, through legal measures, discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. While this meeting has discussed sexual orientation and not included it in the document, New Zealand interprets "other status" in the introduction to the final outcome statement, in paragraph 2 *bis,* as consistent with its Human Rights Act 1993, to include marital status, ethical belief, colour, national origin, political opinion, employment **19 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** status and sexual orientation. New Zealand looks to sexual orientation becoming consistent with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by the time we meet again to review Beijing+10. We thank all those who have made this meeting possible, and we ask that this statement be reflected in the final record of the plenary.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua supports the consensus won here at the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly in the five-year review process of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twentyfirst century". We request that the reservations we have lodged be included in the outcome document. Our reservations touch, first, on the fact that, whenever the document refers to "commitments" or "steps taken" by Governments, it should be understood that United Nations conferences are not legally binding and that the implementation of recommendations emanating from them is the responsibility of the sovereign State of Nicaragua. Second, Nicaragua recognizes the equality and dignity of all people and equal

rights for both sexes, while interpreting the term “gender” in its generally accepted, ordinary sense, as recognized at the Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women and reflected in annex IV of the report of that Conference. Gender is the biological sexual identity of women and men. We understand that there are only two genders: the female — meaning women — and the male — meaning men. We develop our gender perspective on the basis of this understanding. Third, Nicaragua acknowledges the right to life from the moment of conception until its natural end. That is why induced abortion or interrupted pregnancy, however construed, cannot be considered as a means of family planning or fertility regulation as defined at the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development. Any legislation governing this issue is the sovereign business of the Nicaraguan nation. Fourth, when the document refers to contraception, we interpret the reference as not implying to any substance or method involving abortion. We accept the reference to new technologies so long as it does not imply induced abortion. Nicaragua recognizes the reproductive right and the right to health, which includes sexual and reproductive health, as a component of certain human rights already enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which recognize no connection whatsoever with induced abortion. Fifth, Nicaragua does not recognize the terms “sexual rights” and “sexual orientation”, the definition of which has not been established at United Nations forums or conferences. Sixth, Nicaragua recognizes that the freedoms of thought, conscience and religion are inalienable rights enjoyed by all, including health workers. Seventh, Nicaragua recognizes matrimony and de facto unions of men and women, as well as the various types of families arising from the union of a man and woman, as equal to those that are headed by a **6 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** single parent, man or woman, and to extended families. We declare our commitment to protecting these. Eighth, we understand the term “gender equality” as meaning equity, balance, fairness, full participation, full partnership, equal access and other similar expressions, such as equality under the law, responsibility and opportunities that must exist for the sexes without discrimination — rights which are in fact enshrined in our Constitution. Ninth, comprehensive education from childhood is the prerogative of parents under Nicaragua’s Constitution, article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and article 13 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Tenth, we accept the term “risk-free maternity” so long as it does not imply abortion. Nicaragua does not recognize any new universal human right in paragraph 96 of the Platform for Action referred to in this document.

Niger

I would like, through you Madam Vice-President, to extend to all the members of the Bureau my warm congratulations on the excellent way the work of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women is being carried out. I would also like to extend my congratulations to you for your personal commitment to the defence of the cause of women. I would also like to extend the cordial greetings of His Excellency Mr. Tandja Mamadou, President of the

Republic of Niger, to all the participants in these deliberations, and to convey to them our wishes for success in the pursuit of the objectives that have brought us together here today. Like other members of the international community, Niger has resolutely committed itself to implementing the 12 critical areas of concern of the Beijing Platform for Action. Five years after the holding of the Beijing Conference, we must take note of the fact that the progress achieved by my country has not been linear in nature and that it has varied in relation to time and area of concern. With regard to institutional terms, in 1996 Niger adopted a national policy for the promotion of women, which sets out the Government's major guidelines for the promotion of women. It is in this framework that a national monitoring office for the advancement of women was established. Once it becomes operational, that office will be a clearinghouse for appropriate dialogue for all actors in the area of the advancement of women. Furthermore, a national committee was established and given responsibility for following up the implementation of the Beijing recommendations. Niger's policy for the advancement of women, like the policies of other countries represented here, is not the result of Government action alone. This issue gives rise to great enthusiasm among all partners, State and private alike, and Niger has seen the emergence of a number of civil-society associations and nongovernmental organizations, which work together vigorously to promote the rights of women and children. In the legal sphere, the constitution of the Fifth Republic guarantees equality before the law for all, irrespective of sex or of social, racial, ethnic or religious origin. Yet the women of Niger continue to face persistent social impediments arising mainly from tradition and from an erroneous interpretation of certain precepts of Islam, my country's principal religion. A striking indication of the political courage shown by the leaders of the Fifth Republic is the adoption of a number of texts intended to improve the status of women. Some of these aim to bring national legislation into conformity with international conventions and treaties that my country has ratified, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to cite but one example. Although it is difficult for the women of Niger to enjoy certain rights, because the circumstances that would make this possible do not exist, those women consider that they have reached a major milestone with Niger's accession to the Convention. That milestone also marks another important improvement: an evolution in thinking. Indeed, the discussions leading up to Niger's accession to the Convention were an occasion for the pluralistic and democratic expression of opinions. Subjects once taboo were openly and freely discussed. We can now proceed to considering them in greater depth and to making progress on them. This year, 2000, we shall review all the legal texts relating to women with a view to bringing them into conformity with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The fact that civil society, development partners and the State are all part of this process is in itself a significant advance that we must continue, consolidate and enhance. I turn now to the economic side of the issues before us. Here, my country has an economic recovery programme one of whose priorities is the war on poverty. Studies show that 63 percent of the Niger population is poor, and 34 per cent very poor; women account for 73 per cent of this group. Sixty per cent of the plan's budget is targeted for programmes and projects for women. The women of Niger appreciate this and have welcomed it, especially because increasing the income of women is an integral part of the national framework programme for the war on poverty, which has enabled recipients to improve their standard of living at the community level, and to

own property, especially land. Turning to social issues, the gross educational enrolment rate remains low, at 32.23 per cent, a figure that is even lower for girls: 25.36 per cent. Because of this imbalance, a unit for the enrolment of girls was set up in 1996; its work helped to increase the enrolment rate for girls from 36 per cent in 1996 to higher than 39 per cent in 1998-1999. Schools are encouraged to aim for at least 50 per cent enrolment of girls by the end of 2000. There are indications that this goal could be broadly attained within the time-frame. Eighty per cent of the population — 91 per cent of women — are illiterate. To address this, my country began in 1988 to promote functional literacy for women, through linking literacy to the involvement of women in income-producing activities. The Beijing commitments in this sphere have helped bolster this approach. Literacy remains an essential element of all programmes for women. The tangible results in this area gained Niger a 1999 United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (UNESCO) literacy prize. To the under-enrolment of young girls and the illiteracy of women we must add the various forms of violence of which they are victims. Indeed, the rise in new forms of violence, including sexual violence, against women, and especially against girl children, is a source of real concern. Hence, with encouragement from the Government, a great national movement quickly arose to eliminate all forms of violence against the physical and psychological integrity of women. Through their campaigns to increase awareness about violence against women and the girl child, religious organizations have made a valuable contribution to combating this phenomenon. Along with those organizations, the media too have made a contribution through the formulation and implementation by the Network of Communication Technicians of a communication plan. The Network has done a fine job of spreading knowledge about the Convention o the Rights of the Child and about the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and it is a powerful lever for necessary social mobilization on the priorities that have been established. Similarly, the contribution of the National Association of Traditional Chiefs, which is involved in promoting the schooling of the girl child and in combating violence against girls, is a source of hope, especially because, with their moral authority, traditional chiefs can help efface social ills. In the health field there has been progress in the area of reproductive health: the rate of contraceptive use rose from 4.4 per cent in 1992 to 8.2 per cent in 1998. This admittedly modest achievement was gained with the involvement of Islamic organizations, through information and awareness campaigns among the population — of which, I would recall, 90 per cent is Muslim. I wish now to speak of the low participation of women in decision-making bodies and in public life in general. My country experienced instability between 1995 and 1999, when women's participation in the Government and in the National Assembly fell sharply. Women are under-represented in decision-making areas of State administration. On the other hand, many women are extremely active in our political parties and in civil society. I must acknowledge that we are far from meeting the expectations born of our country's democratization with respect to women's membership of high decision-making bodies. In fact, soon after this process began, women's participation in the National Assembly and in the Government improved slightly, but it later decreased. During the Second Republic, there were five women deputies and one minister. From 1991 to 1993 there were two women in the Government and three in the High Council of the Republic, the parliament of transition. The First Government of the Third Republic included

five female ministers, while the National Assembly had two women. Three women were in the Government, the so-called Transition Government, installed after the dissolution of the National Assembly in 1995. From January 1995 to January 1996, two women were appointed ministers in the Government of Cohabitation, and three women were elected to the National Assembly. The First Government of the Fourth Republic had four female ministers, one of whom was Minister of State. The Second Government of the Fourth Republic also included four female ministers, one of whom was Minister of State, and the Third Republic had three, one of whom was Minister of State. During that same period, only one woman was elected to the National Assembly. The Fifth Republic does not augur well, **5 A/S-23/PV.10** with two women in the Government and only one in the National Assembly. However, women are making some improvements in other spheres, such as diplomacy, higher education and central and territorial administration. As regards the specific case of technical instructions, a letter circulated by the 1999 Transition Government instructed Ministers that women should be favoured in promotion to higher posts if their diplomas and competencies were equal. Furthermore, it was noted that there was an increase in female candidates in the latest legislative elections — that is, 63, 29 of whom were incumbents, compared to fewer than 40 before. Here it is appropriate to hail the contribution made by the committee of the network of female African ministers and parliamentarians, which has led an awareness campaign for women, urging them not only to exercise their right to vote but also to run for office. Recently a law was adopted instituting a quota system to benefit women. According to the terms of this law, at least 25 per cent of the candidates on each list for different elective posts should be women, and 10 per cent of the posts ought to go to women. Also, 25 per cent of posts in the Government and in the central and territorial administrations and other high-level, non-elected posts should be filled by women. Much remains to be done, but what has been attained should be encouraged, and strategies under way require the entire support of the international community in order to overcome all the challenges we face at the beginning of this twenty-first century marked by globalization. Speaking of challenges, I would like to underscore the fact that my country remains persuaded that sustained attention should be focused on the responsibility and mobilization of all, through dynamic world partnership with a view to universal access to basic social services and equality between the sexes, to make this a living reality. But how can we attain such objectives if we continue to witness, without reacting, the drastic reduction of official development assistance, which constitutes the principal source of external financial support for the poorest countries? How can we attain these objectives if the heavily indebted poor countries, such as my own, do not benefit from more flexible conditions alleviating the debt that strains their already too meagre resources? These are some of the ideas that I wanted to present to the Assembly.

Nigeria

I wish, on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, to convey our heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing away of President Hafez Al-Assad. We ask the Syrian delegation to transmit our condolences to the Government and people of

the Syrian Arab Republic. It is with great pleasure that I address this gathering on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, at the closing meeting of this historic session of the General Assembly. Beijing+5 has finally come to a successful conclusion. After five days of hard work, the women of the world — through the outcome document — have taken another step forward to consolidate the gains of the past. Now the march towards gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century is irreversible. The Group of 77 salutes all delegations that have worked so hard for the historic decisions elaborated in the outcome document. Over the past few days we have devoted time to review our achievements. We have identified the obstacles and challenges facing us. More important, we have taken new initiatives to combat poverty, particularly among women. Equally, we have taken important initiatives on violence against women. Practical steps have also been taken to advance women's and girls' education and to extend the frontiers of women's rights. Overall, the outcome document has laid before us a wave of new initiatives in the form of programmes and projects. We urge that they be effectively pursued and implemented in all the critical areas of concern. We expect action at the national and international levels. In this regard, we expect the solid support and involvement of the multilateral institutions. The partnership we forged with civil society organizations in Beijing has been further strengthened. The statements made by the leaders of respective delegations of member States of the Group of 77 in plenary meetings send one clear and loud message — that for the countries of developing nations the issue of political will and commitment to the goal of gender equality is beyond doubt. All have demonstrated through concrete action the determination to march forward towards the goal of empowering women. Practically all have undertaken policy reforms and established mechanisms that will propel gender equality and opportunities for women. They have all shown unwavering commitment towards gender mainstreaming in their developmental goals. It is now for the international community, the developed countries and the multilateral financial institutions to demonstrate their commitment to genuine cooperation with the developing countries in the areas of the advancement of women. In this connection, I renew the call on developed countries to support in concrete terms, through financial resources, the efforts of developing countries in the implementation of policies for sustained economic growth and development. This is the only way in which we will be able to reposition our countries and our peoples for the great task ahead, particularly as we set out in the outcome document. We trust that at the dawn of the new millennium — indeed, because of our common humanity — our partners will not fail us in this historic task. In closing, let me through you, Mr. President, thank all delegations for their spirit of flexibility, which ensured that we have not gathered in vain in New York over the past five days, but have **7 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** significantly advanced the interests of the women of the world. I must also thank the Secretary-General and the entire staff of the Secretariat, who have worked so hard for the success of this momentous event. We wish all delegations a very safe journey back to their destinations.

Norway

On behalf of the Norwegian delegation, I would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the demise of President Hafez Al-Assad. My delegation truly appreciates the adoption of the political declaration and the outcome document. The outcome document contains important issues and actions necessary for the further and full implementation of the Platform for Action. Nevertheless, my delegation would have preferred the inclusion of certain additional elements, as reflected in the negotiations by the spokespersons for the JUSCANZ Group. These elements are:
the question of discrimination on the grounds of sexual **20 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** orientation and recognition of the sexual rights of women and the need for secure and safe abortion, inter alia, the decriminalization of abortion. Our views on these issues were presented by the Norwegian Minister for Children and Family Affairs in her statement in the plenary during this special session. We are equally disappointed that no agreement could be reached on steps taken after Beijing regarding the use of landmines, which disproportionately affect the lives of girls.

Oman

At the outset, on behalf of the delegation of Oman, I would like to express our sincere condolences on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic and stand in solidarity with the people of Syria in their time of grief. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to reaffirm our commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and to the implementation of the further actions in the outcome document, in accordance with our national laws and the Islamic shariah. My delegation requests that this statement be reflected in the report of this special session.

Pakistan

On behalf of the people and Government of Pakistan, I wish to express our deepest condolences to and solidarity with the people and Government of the Syrian Arab Republic on the sad demise of their great leader, President Hafez Al-Assad. May God Almighty shower his blessings on his departed soul. My delegation is very pleased with the adoption of the progressive and forward-looking outcome document by consensus. Pakistan will implement these commitments as a matter of high priority to translate the words into concrete actions on the ground to achieve the objectives of gender equality and development into a living reality. This implementation process will be guided, like the Beijing Platform for Action, by the shariah law and the Constitution of Pakistan. I also wish to take this opportunity to thank the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, and her other colleagues in the Bureau for their untiring efforts to make this process a success. I also wish to thank the thousands of nongovernmental organization representatives who have greatly contributed to this process by sensitizing the world community to the issues affecting women and children.

Our appreciation and thanks also go to the Secretariat, interpreters and everyone else at the United Nations who have contributed to this process.

Peru

On behalf of the Peruvian Government and on my own behalf, I wish to extend a sisterly welcome to all of the women of the world who are present here at this special session of the General Assembly. In spite of our physical, cultural and linguistic differences, we as women face the same problems. We must therefore maintain a spirit of solidarity among ourselves and with those who need our support. I also extend my congratulations to the President, Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab, and to the members of the Bureau for the important work that they have accomplished. The Peruvian Government, represented by the President of the Republic, Mr. Alberto Fujimori, reiterated at Beijing its belief that women should control their own destiny, and undertook with determination to implement the agreements and commitments of the Fourth World Conference on Women, which we are reaffirming today. Accordingly, the Peruvian Government created in 1996 the Ministry for the Promotion of Women and Human Development in order to promote and harmonize public policies, in particular government policies, aimed at the advancement of women, thus taking a historic step towards integrating the gender approach and the women's agenda into national priorities. Furthermore, the 2000-2005 national plan to ensure equal opportunities for men and women is being implemented by the Ministry over which I have the **12 A/S-23/PV.10** honour to preside. The realization of that plan involves all sectors of the State. In accordance with our political will to advance the status of women, other, higher-level bodies have been created, such as the congressional Women's Committee and the Public Defender's Office for Women. For more than 12 years my country was the victim of terrorist attacks that isolated us and gave rise to uncertainty about our future. During that time, women played an important role, establishing a social network and deploying the necessary efforts to weather the crisis. I think we were very brave in the face of this terrorist violence, which resulted in the murders of thousands of women leaders, municipal authorities and innocent men and women, and of thousands of policemen and soldiers. It was a horrific situation for us, but we did not give in. We do not wish to remember that time and thus relive our suffering, but neither do we wish to forget, so that we may prevent this from ever happening again. That is why the Peruvian people supported the firm decision of our President to eliminate terrorism, and today peace and democracy prevail in Peru. Government policy for the next five years includes the following priorities: the struggle against poverty; the creation of jobs; modernization; and the overall development of our country. The efforts that have been made to alleviate poverty through social programmes aimed at women have taken a quantum leap forward. Schools have been created that teach leadership and negotiating skills, foster self-esteem and provide the training that facilitates women's entry into the labour force. Legal standards are now in place in the area of employment and wages which penalize employers that discriminate against women by paying them lower wages than men. The right of women to prenatal and post-partum leave has been re-established, as well as the right to breastfeed for one hour a day. Laws have also been passed that prohibit the firing of women due to

pregnancy. Initiatives have been taken to increase the participation of women in the labour force by offering them training, counselling, revolving loans and through the establishment of small and micro-enterprises, which have become sources of jobs for other women. We want our women to be productive and economically independent so that day by day they will become less and less subject to mistreatment. Acknowledging the importance of the political participation of women, in 1997 the Government enacted a law on quotas for municipal and parliamentary elections which has already produced positive results. In 1999 women tripled their presence at the level of local government, and twice as many women will be represented at the next session of Congress, set to begin on 28 July. This measure has made it possible for those women who are leaders of urban, rural and sports organizations as well as women from all walks of life to take up the challenge of participating in political life. Breaking with tradition, two women have presided over Congress in recent years, and women have also chaired various committees within this important legislative body. Women in Peru today have access to decision-making posts and positions of power, and can have an effect in bringing about the necessary changes to consolidate a fairer society in which there is gender equality. Acknowledging that the elimination of family violence is an indispensable condition for human development to take place, our efforts have given priority to this area. Thus, the legislation on family violence enacted in 1997 has been progressively fine-tuned on the basis of international standards and agreements, to guarantee greater protection to victims. In this connection, we are promoting the establishment of comprehensive, efficient and high-quality care centres which are completely free of charge and which provide users police, legal, psychological, social and medical care, as well as the services of a prosecutor for family matters. These centres, known as women's emergency centres, have been set up at the national level and have served to encourage more women to break their silence. It is silence that very often causes millions of women throughout the world to live hoping that their situation will change while they do nothing. Our Government has understood that to invest in the elimination of family violence is to invest in our development, since the culture of peace that we aspire to must be consolidated from the home while strengthening families so that they may behave democratically and respect the rights of their members. **13 A/S-23/PV.10** The family, which is regarded as the basic unit of society, should be linked by love and respect and not by violence and mistreatment. That is why this year has been designated in my country as the year to combat family violence, in order to give greater attention and effect to these measures. We have undertaken the task of encouraging men to change, to assume their family responsibilities and to manage their emotions so as to allow their homes to become harmonious and peaceful spaces in which the development of family members takes place actively. We acknowledge that health is a basic human right, a right that includes sexual and reproductive rights. We do not promote abortion as a family planning method, and in this regard our Government has been committing appropriate resources for Peruvian women to be able to decide for themselves the size of their families and when they want to have relations, how to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, have greater access to health services and to the different reproductive health options. In order to lower and eliminate maternal mortality rates, child and maternity insurance was recently established for all the women of my country, and measures to prevent adolescent pregnancies have been reinforced. I do not wish to see, either in my country or in the world, adolescents become pregnant as a result of an accident, lack of

experience or of lack of information. Since education is the keystone to building an egalitarian and democratic society, a number of measures have been taken to increase school attendance of young girls in the educational system. We have placed special emphasis on health protection and care through free school insurance for all of my country's students. We have carried out mass campaigns in preventing sexual and child abuse. Our efforts have been centred on bridging gender gaps in girls' school attendance rates. This has been reflected in the changes in attitude of fathers, who have historically given priority to the education of their male children. Another indicator is that the number of women between the ages of 15 and 24 years of age attending colleges and universities now equals that of men. In the fight to combat female illiteracy, we have succeeded in reducing the illiteracy rate of women from 18.3 per cent, when I took office, to 7.8 per cent in 1999. What we have achieved in Peru illustrates the fact that when there is political will and the willingness to work, seemingly impossible goals can be achieved. This is why ministries for women's affairs are in the hands of women, see through the eyes of women and feel with the hearts of women. This year we had the honour to preside over the eighth session of the regional conference on women in Latin America and the Caribbean, where the Lima Consensus was unanimously adopted. That document represents the position of our region at this important special session of the General Assembly. The arduous tasks of promoting respect and recognition of the rights of women is a task incumbent upon us all. That is why I wish to say loud and clear that my Government pledges not to backtrack one step on regional consensuses and to continue resolutely to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. We women cannot wait any longer. We cannot remain silent. The time has come for our voices to be heard and for us to move from words to deeds. We are entering a new century, the century of women. We are going to show that when women work, problems, difficulties and pain do not exist, and that women make headway because they were born courageous. In closing, I would once again like to say that the future of the entire world is in the hands of women and that we will work for the women of the world and for the women of the countries most in need, as well as for our girls. May God bless you and may you all return safely to your countries.

Philippines

My delegation joins others in expressing sincere condolences to the people and the Government of Syria on the passing away of the respected and esteemed President of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Hafez Al-Assad. Let me express my profound appreciation for the work of the Secretariat, led by Ms. Angela King and by the Director of the Division for the Advancement of Women, Ms. Yakin Ertürk; for the effective management of the special session; and for the patience and flexibility shown by delegations, which led to the adoption of the outcome document and to the successful conclusion of the special session. It is with great pleasure that we join other delegations, and reaffirm our Government's commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action and to the further actions and initiatives agreed upon at the present session. We would like especially to thank those delegations and non-governmental organizations that supported us in working for stronger commitments to address such issues as trafficking in women and girls, women migrants

and women migrant workers, and those in poverty situations, including marginalized and vulnerable groups of women and girls. Our delegation is very pleased with the stronger commitment to these issues under the outcome document; with this we can truly say that we have taken another step forward in advancing the goals of gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century. The Philippine Government will adopt an updated plan of action for gender-responsive development, covering the period 2000-2004, which we hope will fully implement our commitments under the outcome document. Finally, we hope that, through the South- South cooperation adopted as part of the outcome document, partnership among countries will flourish even more, fostering enhanced implementation of our commitments.

Poland

The Republic of Poland wishes to support the consensus reached at this twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" — the fifth anniversary review of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women. Poland wishes to submit the following reservations. Poland, according to national law, recognizes the equality, dignity and rights of men and women in all spheres of life. We respect life from conception until natural death. We respect the absolute right of conscience, especially as concerns health-care providers' involvement in abortion procedures, and we respect freedom of religion for all peoples. We respect the right of parents to raise their children in the family, and we accord priority to parents and their obligation to educate their children. We reiterate, and hold to, the decision made by the General Assembly, as stated in Assembly documents issued in 1996 and in Economic and Social Council documents issued in 2000, that, because the Beijing Platform for Action was accepted only after difficult compromises, the Beijing +5 review conference should not reopen negotiations on the Beijing document. Accordingly, no new wording or phraseology introduced during these negotiations will be accepted, especially terms that are not defined in United Nations consensus documents. The purpose of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly has been to review five years of implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Portugal

I should like to make a statement on behalf of the European Union and on behalf of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Romania and Turkey. **17 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** Before addressing matters concerning the special session, I should like to express our sincere condolences on the passing away of President Al-Assad, and to request the Syrian delegation kindly to convey those sentiments to the people and the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic. The special session, as well as various regional meetings, brought together women from all over the world. Governments, international

organizations, the press, non-governmental organizations and other members of civil society have come together, discussed vital issues, shared experiences, learned from one another. We have found new ways to work together towards what we are all here for: the full implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, which, together with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, remains the cornerstone of the pursuit of gender equality. What happened here is a step forward — maybe a small step, but a step nonetheless — in promoting women's human rights. We have made real progress towards gender equality, development and peace. We have reaffirmed the role of education in the empowerment of women. We agreed on new and clear language on State obligations to end violence against women, including domestic violence, marital rape and crimes committed in the name of "honour". We have recognized the essential role of gender equality and women's participation in poverty-eradication and in development, and the importance of clear targets and indicators for gender equality. We have underlined the enormous contribution women make to the economy and the importance of laws and policies that enable women to make that contribution. There is a clear call that men and women should equally share the tasks of unpaid work, such as household work and caring for dependants. Gender equality is a men's as well as a women's responsibility. We have highlighted the crucial role of non-governmental organizations. We have called for a gender perspective in macroeconomic policies. We have reaffirmed that the human rights of women include the right to have control over matters related to their sexuality and to decide freely and responsibly about them. A growing number of countries have introduced legislation to prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It has not proved possible expressly to mention that achievement in the document we have just adopted. The European Union is committed, by article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, to combat discrimination on the basis of sex, race or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Such discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is incompatible with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and it should be ended. Although the document just adopted contains a number of crucial issues for gender equality, we are disappointed that it contains no explicit reference to the sexual rights of women. In our opinion, sexual rights are covered in the document, as they were at Beijing. If you recognize these rights, why can you not use the term? We hope that "sexual rights" will very soon become standard terminology in the United Nations. We also regret that it was not possible to utilize in the final outcome document the language agreed last year at the special session on Cairo+5 with regard to abortion issues. I should like to take this opportunity to express our profound appreciation for the hard work of all those involved in the preparation of this review and of the outcome document. In that context, we express our sincere thanks to the Secretariat, including the interpreters and the conference officers; to the Bureau, particularly the Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole, the chairs of working groups and the contact group, and facilitators. Our thanks go also to our negotiating partners and to non-governmental organizations; they filled us with enthusiasm and ideas, and kept us on our toes. We have worked hard for this outcome; it is a real achievement. Let us now all go out and implement it.

Qatar

At the outset, I would like to express our heartfelt condolences to the great Syrian people and the Arab nation on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. May God bless his soul. I also wish to convey our gratitude to the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and to the members of the Bureau and the Secretariat, the organizers, liaison officers and the interpreters, for their considerable efforts in facilitating the work of delegations and in the conduct of the negotiations. My delegation has effectively participated in the negotiations on this final document of the twenty-third special session, based on Qatar's determination to advance the status of women. We would like to thank all of the delegations that contributed to the consensus, of which we are a part, and we would like to reiterate that Qatar will implement all of the recommendations in accordance with our Constitution, our laws and our national traditions. Further, we would like our statement to be incorporated into the final report of the session.

Russian Federation

On behalf of the delegation of Russia, I would like to express our most sincere condolences in connection with the death of the President of Syria, Mr. Al-Assad. Together with the friendly people of Syria, we today express our sorrow at the passing away of this outstanding political leader. We welcome the successful conclusion of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, with the consensus adoption of the political outcome document, in which the community of nations attempts to give an answer to the urgent issues encountered by women and the entire world today. I would like to thank all delegations, the Bureau of the special session, and the coordinators of the Working Groups. We are also grateful to our partners in the non-governmental organizations, who have helped us to reflect the views of civil society in the document of the twenty-third special session. We are grateful to the Secretariat, the interpreters, the translators and all those who have helped us to reach a successful conclusion to the twenty-third special session. The main thing now is to attain maximum encouragement and implementation to turn the political document into a reality.

Rwanda

My delegation joins others in expressing our deepest sympathy to the Government and people of Syria on the passing away of President Al-Assad. My delegation is highly disappointed that paragraph 51 of the final outcome document has been adopted without a reference to genocide and other crimes against humanity, as suggested earlier by the Group of 77's more adequate language. The reason given was nothing but a technicality, according to which other paragraphs could then be opened for discussion. That is not true, and we continue strongly to believe that. The majority of delegations do not accept that excuse, and my delegation wishes to express its strongest reservations on that omission. That omission sends an odd message — a very strange one indeed — to the membership of the United Nations: that the crimes of genocide that have occurred in previous years are not

taken seriously by some Members. My delegation wishes to remind everyone that the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide binds all those that have signed and ratified it. Conveniently avoiding this point **8 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** is a serious omission, and we wish to distance ourselves from it, because we know what happened to our people — and especially to women and children, who are our focus today. The consequences will last for generations, and the Rwandan delegation considers this omission to indicate disregard for the suffering that our people — especially women and children — have endured and continue to endure. Genocide is not a Rwandan phenomenon; it is the worst form of crime against humanity and should therefore be condemned on all occasions by all Member States that uphold the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter and in the genocide Convention. We seem to choose to close our eyes when we should be keeping them open. We are sending the wrong message. It should be the practice of the United Nations and of others to ensure that our past mistakes are corrected whenever the chance is offered. I take this opportunity to thank the representatives of South Africa, the Sudan, Libya, Syria, Iran and many others for their strong support and their tireless efforts through the long hours of this morning to secure the inclusion of "genocide and other crimes against humanity" as a phrase in the text. It is thus our duty to express our serious and strong reservations about the text and the language used, which omits reference to genocide and other crimes against humanity. We wish to reaffirm the commitment of the Government of Rwanda to observe the rest of the recommended paragraphs in the draft outcome document, and our full political support in the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action.

Saint Vincent and the Grenadines

Please permit me on behalf of my Government, to extend sincere congratulations to Mr. Theo-Ben Gurirab of Namibia on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its special session on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century". The stated purpose of this session is to reaffirm our commitment to the goals and objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, to review and appraise progress and to identify new challenges and trends to ensure that commitments for gender equality, development and peace are fully realized. I reaffirm my Government's commitment to implementing that vision in areas where we have not done so, with a sense of urgency. Five years ago, the landmark Beijing Platform for Action was designed to place women's empowerment and the achievement of gender equality at the core of development thinking and planning. Further, while five years ago there was much planning to address the negative effects of structural adjustment programmes, my Government had not envisaged the obstacles which the negative impact of globalization and trade policies have placed in the path of implementing the high goals of the Platform for Action. The well-being of our small island developing State has been rendered more vulnerable and more at risk by the adverse effects of globalization than by natural disasters such as an active volcano or hurricanes. The case study of the Windward Islands banana industry is relevant here. The decline in the banana industry due to challenges from "friendly" countries and to the subsequent ruling by the World Trade Organization has impacted not only on women, who comprise a large segment of the agricultural sector, but also on large numbers of the population at large. There is evidence that the living

conditions of rural women have deteriorated, leading to increased feminization of poverty. **27 A/S-23/PV.10** Indeed, poverty surveys have shown the increasing burden of poverty on women in the affected areas. My Government has recognized the need to move beyond these surveys, and has moved to provide credit facilities for women, in addition to subsidies, public assistance and public employment schemes in collaboration with the private sector. My Government is also encouraged by the new policy direction of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank towards poverty reduction measures at the microlevel, and has introduced a gender focus in poverty reduction programmes. My Government notes with grave concern that HIV/AIDS is having a devastating effect on all regions of the world. Indeed, statistics provided by the World Health Organization show that, in the Caribbean, women in the 15-to-29 age group are most affected. For developing States without adequate access to advanced medicine or to financial resources for such critical health needs, the cooperation of the international community is essential to assist in efforts to control and eradicate this scourge. My Government is committed to collaborating on a regional plan of action with the health sector to deal with the AIDS pandemic. In the interim, my Government is allocating resources for the care of affected persons and for adolescent reproductive care, as well as for a strengthened family-life education programme in schools. Prior to the provisions in the Beijing Platform for Action, my Government had passed progressive legislation eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, thus establishing gender equality. Legislation to address the increasing violence against women within our society was also enacted. This trend continued as my Government adopted Caribbean Community (CARICOM) model legislation, and it was the first in the Caribbean to establish a family court. In addition, St. Vincent and the Grenadines joined with 16 other regional countries in implementing a training course in domestic violence intervention and prevention methodologies for the police and social workers. This bold step is being done in collaboration with our social partners. My Government is committed to implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol, so as to ensure that the human rights of women are preserved. Included in these rights is respect for the diversity of our people's indigenous women, women with disabilities and the continued access to education for pregnant adolescent and young mothers. My Government has also embarked on programmes to address the needs of senior citizens, bearing in mind the needs of older women. My Government recognizes the contribution of women to the development of our country and is committed to creating an enabling environment to encourage women to seek and win election to Parliament. This commitment has been demonstrated by the selection of a young professional woman to the House of Parliament as a Senator and as Deputy Speaker of the House of Assembly. In addition, women continue to hold top managerial and administrative positions throughout the public and private sectors. My Government is aware that, in order to change the stereotyping of women, the root causes must be addressed, and it has targeted education as a vehicle for change. The Government has also embarked on a textbook series review to address gender bias in the school curriculum, training in gender-based teaching strategies, and it has placed gender-sensitive guidance counsellors in schools. As a result, there is an increase in the number of girls doing non-traditional subjects at secondary school level. This is also true for boys. To further these efforts, my Government will participate in a regional programme for sex-disaggregated data on functional literacy, school attendance and

subject selection. Saint Vincent and the Grenadines acknowledges the importance of the media in disseminating information on the Beijing Platform for Action. It is equally concerned that the status of women has been affected by negative portrayal in the media. The educational process will provide a new image of women, but we need cooperation and partnership with the media. Therefore, in our institutional mechanism, there is a media representative on the National Commission on Women. My Government welcomes the review process, which is progressing to a successful completion. We have been taking concrete steps to ensure the elevation of women and have certainly learned from the best practices of other countries. We are encouraged to **28 A/S-23/PV.10** pursue a process of continuing review as we implement the Platform for Action. In closing, my Government acknowledges the contribution of civil society, women's organizations, the private sector, trade unions and other nongovernmental organizations to the development of our country. We, therefore, recognize that it is very imperative to involve all sectors of society at the national level and to foster close cooperation with regional and international counterparts if we are to successfully implement the Beijing Platform for Action.

Samoa

I am indeed deeply honoured to address this gathering on behalf of the Government and people of Samoa on the occasion of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly. By the Charter of the United Nations Organization we the peoples of the United Nations once again reaffirm at this great gathering our faith in fundamental human rights and freedoms, the dignity and worth of the human person and the equal rights of men and women of all nations large and small. Samoa is an independent, sovereign State in the Pacific region. Our culture is central to our way of life. Our people's bond with the land and sea is founded on our traditional values and strong Christian principles, which motivate and sustain us physically and spiritually. Our Government believes that human rights and freedoms are best nurtured in the context of our culture and traditions. In this respect, the Constitution of Samoa, inspired by the principles embodied in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, represents a strong commitment to human rights and freedoms, with particular reference to equality of opportunity for all citizens, irrespective of gender. The traditional *Fa'a-Samoa*, the Samoan way of life, recognizes the paramount value of every Samoan person, as he or she is an heir to a family chiefly title, land and the Samoan language. The Government of Samoa's economic strategy statement for the period 2000 to 2001 emphasizes in its vision the essence of partnership for a prosperous society, hence acknowledging women as equal partners in every way. Women in Samoa have equal access to education and health services, employment opportunities, the protection of laws and to decisionmaking positions at all levels within the family, community and Government. There has always been recognition and support in Samoa of the multiple roles women perform in the home, community, church and their professions. The establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs by an act of Parliament in 1990 demonstrates the high regard that the Government of Samoa has for its women and for their contribution to the development of Samoa economically, socially, politically and spiritually. Samoa is one of the few countries in the world that has a national holiday

for women — the Monday after Mother's Sunday each year. This year marks the tenth anniversary since its inception. The establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs was also an important milestone towards laying the foundation of ensuring equal opportunities for women and children in all areas of the Samoan society. This was further strengthened when Samoa ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in 1992, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, in 1994. In compliance with the commitments that Samoa has agreed to undertake by ratifying relevant regional agreements and international conventions, a national policy for the women of Samoa for the period 2000 to 2004 has been prepared and awaits approval by the cabinet. The vision of the national policy is clear: for all women of Samoa to be productive contributors to, as well as full beneficiaries of, national development for the attainment of quality of life for all. Its undertaking is distinct: to develop and enhance the capacity of the women of Samoa in all spheres in partnership with stakeholders, ensuring in particular that women are well informed of their human rights, as well as ways and means of accessing needed services and resources. We believe that it is important to reaffirm our basic human rights and well-being through our national policy for the women of Samoa. **36 A/S-23/PV.10** The Ministry of Women's Affairs corporate plan for the period 2000 to 2003 identifies key areas in both the Beijing Platform for Action and the 1994 Pacific Platform for Action, to which the Government of Samoa has given priority for implementation in partnership with non-governmental organizations. The advancement of women in Samoa has been facilitated by the work of many governmental and nongovernmental organizations, in particular those that have been instrumental in advocating human rights in relation to violence against women and the rights of the child. In 1995, the regional " Healthy Islands" declaration advocated the health promotion concept that promotes healthy settings where people live and congregate. In this connection, the " Healthy Islands" declaration further reaffirms the value given by the women of Samoa to healthy homes and healthy villages, and focuses on wellness as an asset. We believe that this is a fundamental entry point to both the success of women's advancement in all areas, as well as the practical translation of the Beijing Platform for Action. We do not pretend to have fully implemented the critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action but, as we mentioned earlier, we have prioritized areas of concern in accordance with our country's realities. We believe that the emphasis that our Government has given to improving health and education in Samoa will further enhance the efforts of all women and men in translating the Beijing Platform for Action into expected outcomes. While it is universally recognized that the average human being can only perform or accomplish so much, the ability of women to fulfil their roles as mothers, wives, caregivers, community developers and career women is an exceptional feat.

Such extraordinary yet basic realities, however, are not always accorded due recognition and appreciation, as they are often overshadowed by issues surrounding the critical areas of concern in the Beijing Platform for Action. Therefore, to all the women around the world we say: we celebrate your achievements to date. Your courage and commitments to the well-being of the people of the world is acknowledged with the utmost respect and admiration.

Sao Tome and Principe

First of all, allow me to express my warmest thanks to the Secretariat of the United Nations, the body that has organized the event that has brought us together here in New York. I would also like to wish the greatest success for our work and to express the hope that our results will be translated into realities in all of our countries. In Sao Tome and Principe, an archipelago made up of two small islands, considered one of the least developed countries, the population in general, and women in particular, are facing the problems of our time, a time of change, of challenges, of a quest for new achievements; of problems that are placed in our paths and which we have to tackle in order to survive as free and independent States. The dizzying changes that the world has been facing in recent times have made women's problems even more critical than ever before. The holding of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 provided an excellent opportunity for the representatives of more than 100 nations to carry out an in-depth discussion of the responsibilities of all — State institutions and non-governmental organizations — with regard to this sector of our population. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women was ratified by Sao Tome and Principe only last year, but its spirit and principles, which were already apparent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, have always been a part of our country's constitutions and are taken into account in government programmes with varying degrees of effectiveness. Starting with Beijing, there was a new attempt to adopt an integrated approach to problems affecting women, which has enabled significant progress to take place. Indeed, the national authorities have increased the awareness of the need effectively to ensure the contribution of our country's women, and women themselves are participating more actively in the design and implementation of solutions that allow them to play a role in national development, primarily in agriculture, raising livestock, trade and crafts. Despite these achievements, however, society in Sao Tome and Principe is still marked by great disparities based on gender and stereotypes that seem to attribute supposed superiority to men. As we all know, changes in attitude take a long time and are very difficult to achieve. However, it cannot be denied that the major conferences organized by the United Nations in the 1990s, such as the World Summit for Children and the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing, have given new vitality to the cause of women. **18 A/S-23/PV.10** We have set up an institutional structure — the department for the promotion of women and the family — which is currently the responsibility of the Prime Minister's Cabinet. This department is the body responsible for following up on the implementation of government policies and activities with respect to women and the family. After Beijing, this department supported by civil society, set up a commission which drew up a proposal for a national platform for action which should make it possible to implement the outcomes of this conference. That document was then presented to civil society, which contributed to enriching and validating it. The conditions for the development of a plan of action for women of Sao Tome and Principe, to be implemented by the Government, have also been created. At the same time, several projects have been designed to improve the situation of women in rural and urban areas, among which I should like to stress the project to combat poverty. The Government has adopted constructive measures aimed at facilitating the participation of women in decision-making. The authorities are in the process of creating professional centres open to both men and women. Furthermore, we have also begun to

introduce appropriate technologies in rural communities in order to ease the lives of the inhabitants in general, and women in particular. Furthermore, opportunities for women to gain access to technical, advanced and professional training, as well as training in other areas, have been enhanced, so that today, 40 per cent of civil service positions in Sao Tome and Principe are held by women, the health and education sectors being those with the highest percentage. Furthermore, the Government is implementing programmes which will have an impact on women and children in particular. These include reproductive health programmes, and measures to combat AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases and malaria. Generally speaking, in recent years many associations promoting women's rights have emerged in Sao Tome and Principe. Various non-governmental organizations dealing with women's problems have been integrated into a federation, the women's forum of Sao Tome and Principe, which enables them to organize themselves better and makes it easier for them to achieve their goals. I have just provided the Assembly with a very general overview of the situation of women in Sao Tome and Principe at the dawn of the new millennium. But the positive achievements have not caused the Government to forget that considerable work remains to be done, not only because of attitudes but also, and above all, because of the very difficult economic situation which Sao Tome and Principe, like most developing countries, is facing. Nevertheless, my Government believes that one of its most important objectives is the real participation of women who, let us not forget, represent more than half of the population of Sao Tome and Principe. Our Government is thus fully determined to take the necessary steps so that, in Sao Tome and Principe, being a woman means being a full-fledged citizen.

Saudi Arabia

My delegation congratulates you, Mr. President, on the successful outcome of this twenty-third special session. We thank you for your great efforts, as well as those of the members of the Bureau to bring about that successful outcome. The Government of Saudi Arabia reaffirms its commitment to the implementation of the provisions of this document in a manner that does not contradict Islamic shariah and Saudi Arabia's national laws. I would like this statement to be reflected in the final outcome document of the Conference.

Senegal

On behalf of the President of the Republic of Senegal, His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, and of my delegation, I endorse the condolences expressed by others to the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and its entire people on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad. We pray that Mother Earth will receive him and that God will welcome him in Paradise. My delegation stands shoulder to shoulder with the rest of Africa and the entire African Group in endorsing the statement made on behalf of the G-77 and welcomes the success that has capped this twenty-third special session. We have in our hands a final document of the utmost significance to women the world over, a final document that is balanced, and

takes into account the interests and concerns of delegations, as well as the fundamental role played by nongovernmental organizations and civil society in making a reality of the Beijing Platform for Action and fresh initiatives to be adopted at this session. We owe this outcome to the spirit of cooperation sustained throughout this process shown by all of us, by the Secretariat, the Chairpersons of our meetings, the representatives that have participated in this session, and the various actors and partners, all of us acting in the spirit of consensus which has carried the day through this final document. We have no reservations, although we would have liked to see a more aggressive document. We reiterate our commitment to translating into deeds all the recommendations that have come out of our work concerning strict respect for human rights, as well as to peace and development in our respective countries. International cooperation should be reinforced to allow us to come up with innovative solutions to the economic and financial constraints facing developing countries, notably in Africa, so that we may better translate into reality the common commitments made by the international community to protect and promote the fundamental rights of women. I conclude by thanking you, Mr. President, personally, and by thanking Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Ms. Angela King and the entire Secretariat for the perfect organization of this special session.

Seychelles

The equality of men and women in Seychelles has been receiving the attention of the Government from the time that the Republic was established some 23 years ago. Seychellois women have always been recognized as essential partners in the development of the country. In addressing gender-related matters, Seychelles took a somewhat different approach from most countries by straightaway adopting a mainstreamed approach. More than a decade ago, a National Gender Steering Committee, composed of individuals from Government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations, was established to promote and maintain gender equality and equity. Male representation on the Committee provided a collaborative atmosphere and ensured that the needs of both males and females were taken into consideration in the design of national development programmes. Seychelles' constitutional charter of fundamental human rights and freedoms applies to all citizens, irrespective of gender. There are, however, specific regulations within the legislative framework that protect the civil and human rights of women. Some of these are, first of all, the right to pass on their nationality to their children born in Seychelles, even if the husband is a foreigner; secondly, the right to own property and to inherit; and, thirdly, the right to claim alimony from a defaulting partner — married or common-law. In dealing with women and poverty, the Government of Seychelles recognized the role of a good education in empowering men and women towards achieving a reasonable standard of living. A policy of ten years compulsory and free education ensures that all boys and girls have the same access to education and career opportunities. School enrolment for children, which presently stands at 100 per cent, has guaranteed that all girls are given the essential foundation for making important life choices. Last year 46 per cent of scholarships for professional training went to women. With the understanding that the human resource is the main wealth of the country,

the Ministry of Social Affairs and Manpower Development and the Ministry of Education work towards removing stereotypes through education, sensitization and career counselling for young people. Teaching materials have been investigated to remove stereotypes, and teachers have been systematically put through gender sensitization programmes. Conscious of the importance of the health of citizens and the impact of health-care costs on the economy, the Government has taken steps to offer health-care services free at the point of service. Maternity health care is provided in all districts, and indicators show that prenatal care coverage is at 98 per cent. Women also play a crucial role in national decision-making. Seychellois women were fully involved in the struggle for independence and are still politically active. Twenty-one per cent of the elected and nominated members of the National Assembly, and 25 per cent of the Cabinet of Ministers, are women. Recent survey figures show that at grass-roots levels, women are actually more active than men. Women constitute 60 per cent of local government counsellors. We are presently giving much attention to the issue of domestic violence and violence against women. Concerted efforts in public sensitization and education have been most effective in replacing a tolerant and passive attitude with condemnation and a determination to break the recurring cycle. A national family tribunal, which was set up two years ago, is considered an important step in dealing with domestic violence and the rights of women and children. **29 A/S-23/PV.10** Laws and policies have contributed to the advancement of women in Seychelles. However, stereotyping still exists; most women are still found in lower-paid jobs; and women still represent the majority of victims in domestic abuse. We believe that these problems can be traced to inherited and accepted cultural patterns of behaviour, which are often referred to as “norms”, even though they are, if viewed objectively, abnormal: patterns which are known to be resistant to change, since they are often imbedded deep in the human psyche. Changing them will require time and continued and persistent effort. It seems appropriate at this point to insert a few questions about the role of males in all this. What about their needs in this world of redefined gender roles? What should be done to prepare them to be supportive and receptive, not just benignly accepting and tolerant? In conclusion, we note that it is imperative for societies to establish an environment that promotes the self-esteem, confidence and independence of the female half of the population. Fundamental to this are a legal framework which protects the human rights of all individuals equally and an educational system which contributes to the emancipation of all capable individuals. We believe that gender should not be treated as a separate national issue, but that it should be integrated in the whole system. Only in that way can women overcome the handicaps imposed by centuries of unequal treatment and boldly fulfil their human potential.

Sierra Leone

I bring greetings from the Government and people of Sierra Leone, **7 A/S-23/PV.10** especially the women working at the grass-roots level and those men who are working in partnership with us to achieve equal status and opportunities for both men and women. My delegation welcomes the opportunity to assess what we have done in Sierra Leone in the past five years to empower women to be more effective in a strong coalition as

equal partners with men as we enter the twenty-first century. The advancement of women in Sierra Leone or anywhere else in the world cannot be achieved outside this partnership, treated in isolation as a women's issue. We cannot achieve our goals on our own, without partnership being strengthened in social, political, economic, environmental and cultural matters. It is against this background of working in partnership between government and civil society, between women and men, between the richest and poorest States, between the able and the not so able and between the international community and our individual nations that the Beijing Platform for Action must be reviewed and appraised. As we consider the subject of this special session, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", we must be clear in our minds that when we speak of equality, we mean equal opportunities, equal rights, equal status, equal approaches to our common problems. It is not a question of physical strength or even bravery, because women, too, have these attributes, in addition to their special qualities of beauty, delicacy, determination and special perception. The United Nations heard the cries of women in the early 1970s, responding with much positive action before Beijing. But it was the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 that set out a full and complete agenda in the critical areas of concern which must be overcome in this century, and not the next. This is why we trust that, with the aim of achieving a happier world, the final document of this Conference, with its recommendations to the Millennium Summit, will take us way beyond Beijing+5 without taking anything away from what we achieved in Beijing. Sierra Leone adopted the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, but there were a few institutional structures to address the situation, and such structures were generally disjointed. Therefore, in 1996, with the first democratically elected Government in two decades, the Ministry of Gender and Children's Affairs was established, not only to advocate and ensure a more equitable distribution and rational use of public, financial and organizational resources, particularly for women and children, but to coordinate and develop strategies for cementing the interrelationship between government and private institutions and international agencies which address the issues covered under the 12 areas of concern. Other institutional structures that were established include a women's research unit and a gender and research and documentation centre at the University of Sierra Leone. Women themselves took the initiative to set up non-governmental structures to facilitate the Beijing Platform for Action, including such organizations as the Campaign for Good Governance, the Women's Forum, the Sierra Leone chapter of the Forum for African Women's Education, the Sierra Leone Association of University Women, the Alliance of Female Journalists, Sisters Unite and, recently, the Network of Women Ministers and Parliamentarians, to name a few. In the area of power and decision-making, the Government of Sierra Leone appointed women to the important Ministries of Gender and Children's Affairs, Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Housing and Country Planning and, recently, the Ministry of Development and Economic Planning. Women have been made heads of important commissions, such as the National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights, and have been appointed as chairpersons of strategic parastatals, such as those dealing with mining and general services. The number of women has also increased in junior ministerial positions, and even though men continue to dominate parliamentary representation, at 92.2 per cent, women's representation, at 7.8 per cent, marks an improvement when compared with the situation before Beijing. Regrettably, with regard to women and armed conflict, in the course of the brutal

rebel war that has prevailed in Sierra Leone, women, especially young girls, have been abducted, raped and used as sex slaves. This notwithstanding, women remain undaunted. They have encouraged and participated in the settlement of disputes through negotiation, mediation, dialogue, arbitration and reconciliation. One of the most remarkable contributions that women have made to the consolidation of peace in our country since the 1998 Lomé Peace Agreement was their massive turnout **8 A/S-23/PV.10** several weeks ago to protest the illegal detention of some 500 United Nations peacekeepers by rebels of the Revolutionary United Front. Two days later, the women came out again and joined in a mass national demonstration for peace. The result was that 21 people were shot dead, including women, and many wounded by rebels. This was a turning point in the current search for peace. In the area of poverty, we have intensified implementation of our poverty alleviation programmes and embarked on strategic action with a strong policy focus aimed at war victims. A programme of social action for poverty alleviation geared towards gender mainstreaming is headed by a young woman. The health problems of women and girls are being addressed, too, with special attention on maternal mortality, unsafe abortion, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. In all of this, the international community, through the United Nations system, especially the United Nations Population Fund and the United Nations Children's Fund, has been solidly behind us. The education of women and the girl child has been given prominence. One noteworthy achievement is that the educational system has been restructured, among other things, to give prominence to the education of the girl child, especially in the previously male-dominated area of science. In the area of training, many technical and vocational institutions have been established to address the training needs of all young people, girls included. With improved advocacy, these technical and vocational institutions, especially those for girls, have filled what used to be a very big vacuum in the educational system. For the girl child in Sierra Leone, traditional practices within various cultures continue to pose serious challenges to her advancement. A new and significant problem, however, has been the increase of girl mothers resulting from the rape and abduction of children by rebels. Many of the girl children released following the Lomé Peace Agreement were either pregnant or with babies. A new educational policy published in 1995 helps the situation by emphasizing affirmative action in favour of basic education programmes for girls. More than 70 per cent of our women are illiterate. Women have continued until recently to fare very badly in the area of educational opportunities and privileges. The focus on education for the girl child as one of the priority areas is therefore understood and justified. With respect to the economy, concrete steps have been taken to establish and strengthen local mechanisms for the advancement of women in the area of business with access to microcredit schemes, financial institutions and skills development, resulting in a steady increase in small business enterprises owned by women. A special women's unit within the Ministry of Agriculture, for example, ensures that women have access to agricultural services, linkages with donors and other development partners to build women's capacity for agriculture-related activities. In the media, much awareness has been created of women's rights, participation and training in relation to the media. Since Beijing, two media associations have been founded: the Sierra Leone Association of Women in the Media and the Alliance of Female Journalists. With a view to minimizing violence against women and in a bid to express concern, we have concentrated on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination

against Women and condemned the level of abduction, rape, violence, amputation, maiming and other atrocities suffered by women and girls in particular. Women's nongovernmental organizations and the Ministry of Social Welfare, assisted by the United Nations system, are now working together to have a centre to which women subjected to violence can go, especially for free legal services. In the meantime, government and its partners continue to provide counselling services and medical and health education to battered and sexually abused women and girls. Concerning women and human rights, the sensitization of the public on the rights of women continues in various media, including radio and television programmes and a nationwide consultation held in 1998, facilitated by the United Nations Development Programme and carried out jointly by my Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs and the Ministry of Local Government, insofar as customary laws are involved. We have also had a team of women legal practitioners who are currently examining our laws with a view to identifying and seeking revision of any discriminatory provisions. In spite of all the difficulties and problems that have abounded throughout the five-year period since Beijing, due to a senseless rebel war, it is evident that **9 A/S-23/PV.10** whatever we have achieved has been done through sustained action only during the very brief peaceful periods, amounting to no more than two and a half years, which is only half of the period under review. The success of whatever policies Governments make for the empowerment of women will depend largely not only on the institutions, organizations and networks which we ourselves as women establish and maintain to keep the pressure on, but also on our own sincerity as women in these matters. There are many of us who shy away from what we must do and leave men to do it. We cannot afford to do that. The private sector of society must have a commitment, too — women should have a commitment — if there is to be any progress. Whatever we have achieved in my country, Sierra Leone, a lot of credit goes to United Nations agencies, friendly Governments and our partners in the international arena. Without their support, development and peace would have eluded us completely. I thank God that the United Nations hostages have been released, but we should not forget that there are still thousands of Sierra Leoneans who are refugees or displaced people — women and children, mostly, among them — some of whom are still held against their will by the rebels, with continued atrocities and violations of women. They must be released, too, and assisted to resume their normal lives. I take this opportunity to appeal to the international community through this special session to help us maintain commitment to action on the Beijing Platform for Action, first, by devising some action plan against all those in the international community who have contributed directly or indirectly to the prolongation of the conflict in Sierra Leone; secondly, by taking action against the illegal sale of Sierra Leone diamonds, which have fuelled the conflict and have brought so much pain and suffering to our people, particularly women, whom we are here to honour today; thirdly, by helping us strengthen the government machinery for more effective coordination of women's matters; and fourthly, by further assisting the poorest of the poor nations with adequate funding for much-needed social amenities to war widows and those many women who are heads of their homes and family.

South Africa

The South African delegation wishes to join other Member States in expressing our sincere sympathy to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic on the passing of the late President Hafez Al-Assad. My delegation is very pleased that our deliberations on Beijing+5 have been successfully concluded. Without the political will and commitment of all Member States, the negotiations, despite tough and protracted discussions, would not have resulted in the document before us. **4 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** This twenty-third special session on "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century" was convened with the objective of enabling the Governments of our countries to evaluate how far we have come in implementing our commitments. We reiterate our strong commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action, and we support the outcome document that has come out of this process. In fact, we wanted to see the Assembly take the Beijing Platform for Action even further. The South African delegation came with a mandate and a vision to take Beijing 1995 into the new millennium. All human rights of all citizens in South Africa are protected and promoted by a Constitution and Bill of Rights. Our Constitution informed our approach to this process on the basis of choice to issues such as sexual orientation, reproductive rights and abortion. The attainment of the full and accelerated empowerment of women and girls is a constitutional priority for our country. While we note those areas of regression on the Beijing language, we commend this body for having grappled with new challenges, such as globalization, in a manner that helps Member States to address their negative impact. We note also the courage women have shown during these five days in speaking out in defence of their human rights. In instances where this may endanger their lives, we call on the Assembly to ensure their protection. Finally, we do not consider ourselves absolved of our commitment made in 1995 in the Platform for Action. We view the outcome document of this meeting as supplementary to the Platform. My Government is ready to endorse those areas of the outcome document which not only advance the Beijing Platform for Action but also challenge our own national goals. We look forward to implementing these, together with the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as our constitutional imperative at the local, provincial and national levels. We wish to express appreciation to all the members of the Bureau for their sterling work, especially the Chairperson, Ms. Christine Kapalata, and Ms. Angela King of the Division for the Advancement of Women. In addition, we salute the governmental and non-governmental delegations that took part in this process. Although we did not achieve everything we wanted, we are glad South Africa has participated in this special session of the General Assembly, which focused on the challenges of improving the lives of women and girls in all of our countries. Finally, we request that our statement be reflected in the official records of the special session.

Sudan

At the outset, I should like to add my voice to those of my colleagues from other delegations in expressing our heartfelt condolences to the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, its Government and its people on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad, a great leader who worked for a peace based on justice and freedom. I would like also to commend the position of the Group of 77 and China, as expressed by the delegation of sisterly Nigeria. I

should like also to express our satisfaction at the consensus reached on this important document following very difficult, serious and constructive negotiations. My delegation effectively participated, in a spirit of flexibility, seriousness and cooperation, in those negotiations with representatives of other countries. We renew our commitment to implementing the recommendations of this special session in accordance with our Constitution, our national laws, values and norms and the full respect of our national sovereignty, taking into consideration paragraph 2 (b) of the document. I should like my intervention to be included in full in the final document of this session.

Suriname

On behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and my own country, Suriname, I wish to express our sincere condolences on the passing of President Hafez Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, which is a great loss for the people of Syria as well as for the Arabic world and the world at large. Allow me at the outset to express my thanks to you, Mr. President, to the Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Committee of the Whole and to the Chairpersons of the working groups and contact groups, as well as to all of the representatives for their efforts, commitment and dedication during our marathon session, which have allowed us to achieve this final outcome and adopt a final document, as we are about to do. The delegations of the member States of the Caribbean Community, 14 of which are Members of the United Nations, have gathered here in New York, some at tremendous expense, as a demonstration of our commitment to support and advance the Beijing Platform for Action. Our countries contributed to and participated in the preparatory processes leading up to the Fourth World Conference and in Beijing itself. We have made significant sacrifices, both human and financial, to exhibit the same level of commitment to this special session on the Women 2000 review process. There has been no shortage of motivation or commitment on the part of the Caribbean Governments and peoples. To that end, our Governments prioritized the Platform for Action along six critical areas of concern: poverty, health, violence against women, education, institutional mechanisms and women in decision-making. By prioritizing the Platform for Action, the Caribbean has been able to achieve considerable progress in implementing its recommendations. While a tremendous amount of follow-up activities have occurred within our subregion, many new challenges have presented obstacles to achieving all of the goals that we set for ourselves in 1995. For our countries, structural adjustment programmes, globalization and high external debt have been tremendous constraints in implementing the Platform for Action. We acknowledge that globalization may have presented opportunities for some countries. However, we must emphasize that the added cost to our economies and people, particularly the women and children of the States members of the Caribbean community, has been dramatic. The loss of preferential arrangements, debt servicing and limited capacity to overcome the burden of unemployment have had enormous consequences and have increased the number of poor women in many of our countries. The incidence of violence against women and girls has been addressed by Caribbean Governments. We have undertaken and support comprehensive measures in an ongoing effort to eliminate

this practice. We have enacted anti-violence legislation, engaged in public awareness campaigns and promoted research into the root causes of violence in our societies. We are heartened to note that this concept is embedded in the proposed outcome document. In closing, it is our resolve that the attainment of high educational levels for women in the Caribbean will be complemented by an equally high achievement in the political and economic spheres. In this respect, our efforts to achieve gender equality can be successful only if there is an honest partnership between women and men. Gender equality is therefore a win-win situation that elevates both genders, our societies and our countries. Those of us who live in small, fragile States cannot afford to ignore the contribution of women to our sustainable development and the goals of this special session. We therefore remain committed to the further implementation of the Platform for Action and the outcome of the special session. For us, there is no margin for error.

Switzerland

It is with very mixed feelings that I take the floor at nearly the end of this session. Sadness, perplexity, joy and hope are all mixed up within me. We have had an opportunity in this Beijing+5 process; have we succeeded in grasping it or have we wasted it? I will speak first about the sadness. Five years after Beijing, some of the key points are still being disputed, specifically everything concerning the right of women to make autonomous decisions and respect for their human rights. We have had a hard time here to find the necessary compromises. We have not always succeeded; nor have we always understood each other. In spite of the decisions made before the special session, there have been attempts to re-open the Platform for Action and to go backwards with respect to our commitments made in Beijing. Yet, the old problems remain and new ones have appeared that require all of us to work harder. Women still do not enjoy full respect of their human rights. Violence in all of its forms reveals itself in the banality and the horror of domestic violence, as well as in the banality and the horror of the violence of trafficking in human beings or in the banality and horror of conflicts that are tearing apart so many regions. HIV/AIDS is striking all the continents and is particularly ravaging the young population of Africa, destroying its future. Globalization and new technology present opportunities and risks. Unfortunately, we have not yet found the means of minimizing the risks and ensuring that women profit more from the opportunities offered — all women, not just a privileged minority in countries of the North. Poverty all too often reflects a feminine visage, and the strategies for fighting it are not enough by a long shot. Everywhere, women are participating too little in decision-making; their absence or their under-representation in all places of power implies that their needs and interests are not sufficiently taken into account or that they are not taken into account at all. The institutional machinery responsible for upholding the achievement of equality, when they exist at all, continues generally to lack the necessary resources to accomplish their enormous tasks. I now turn to my second point, that of perplexity. I am perplexed by the considerable efforts that have been invested in the Beijing+5 process and by the answers received. Has it been worth the effort? At Beijing, we adopted a demanding and visionary Platform for Action. Are we completing it sufficiently with the two new documents that we are negotiating here? Are they sufficient,

above all, with respect to the actions to be taken, especially actions dealing with current challenges affecting the full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action? For us, it was clear that we could not accept anything less than what we agreed upon in Beijing. We achieved the minimum, but what about all the other issues and those attempts of so many non-governmental organizations that followed our work? We must await the complete document in order to judge it completely. What we already know is that we have achieved progress in the area of health, violence, globalization, economic affairs, human rights and political participation. These are areas where we have made progress. The question now is to find out if we have done an adequate job. Following these questions, I would now like to talk about joy; joy, despite the tension and frustration which have marked many hours spent in this building. We have learned from statements made in the General Assembly and on parallel activities, and especially in meetings and discussion held during negotiations, everything that has been done over the past five years. In one State or region emphasis was placed on the fight against violence, elsewhere on the education of girls and women and finally somewhere else on participation in politics and professional life. Of **40 A/S-23/PV.10** course, it is never enough, but it is what we have done and what we share. This sharing has also made it possible for us to search and often find compromise solutions that go beyond the limits of traditional negotiation groups. The United Nations, this irreplaceable universal forum, has made this vital sharing possible for us, regardless of the difficulties of negotiation. Now I come to the fourth point; I would like to finish with hope. We are all going to leave to return to our countries, our organizations and our institutions. We will each find ourselves with our own realities, but we will not be isolated. We have shared a common experience. We have contacts and networks. We can benefit from the various experiences of different people. We can access common information. We have names and faces, and above all, we have reaffirmed our common commitment made at Beijing and we have developed it. We know that commitment to gender equity is a pivotal point for all commitment to social justice and for the fight for peace and against poverty. This commitment remains and will always be difficult. It demands patient work, which is often thankless and invisible. It is clear that we cannot accomplish this work successfully without cooperating closely with the nongovernmental organizations. They too have their networks, their names and their faces and they are using new technologies to become increasingly efficient. They accomplish their activities and programmes and they never cease to remind us, Governments, of our responsibilities to be faithful to the commitments we have undertaken. We wish to thank non-governmental organizations for their tireless commitment and their courage. May the Declaration and the Platform for Action, adopted at Beijing, together with the Political Declaration and Outcome Document we have just completed, provide all of us with inspiration in the coming years. We know that a real policy of equality cannot be improvised. It requires precise skills and instruments to guide that policy and to measure whether the actions taken have been successful. Above all, it requires a clear political will to be able to turn words into actions. It is our hope, but, above all, it is our responsibility to achieve this.

SyrianArabRepublic

My statement consists of two parts. The first pertains to the great loss of our dear President Hafez Al-Assad, and the second to the outcome document. The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic would like to convey its heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the sincere condolences and the spirit of solidarity that have been expressed in these difficult times, in which we lost our great leader — may God have mercy on him — President Hafez Al-Assad. We are bereaved by the death of our President. He was a leader known to all world leaders for his strategic thinking. He had a deep belief in the principles of right and justice and in national causes and in every inch of his homeland. Our President stood consistently in defence of the interests of his people and of the Arab people as a whole. Throughout his political life, Syria's great leader abided by the principles of international law and those enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. He believed that these principles formed a legitimate basis for the realization of international justice and for the settlement of regional and international disputes. Among the many landmark achievements for which history will remember our great leader, we would mention here his direct concern with women's issues. He was determined to guarantee the rights of women and personally to ensure their total emancipation in order to enable them to stand on an equal footing with men in the social sphere, working together for society's advancement. Our great leader had instructed the chairperson of the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic to this special session to convey his sincere wishes to the conference and to representatives. He had also requested that she convey these wishes to the women of the world, in the hope that the work of this session would be crowned with success. This attests to the personal importance that the President attached to questions relating to the status of women. Syria's commitment to the legacy of our great leader, Hafez Al-Assad, is firm and unwavering. Syria will continue the march towards the advancement of women and will work for the realization of a full, just and comprehensive peace, progress and development. The words of condolence I have heard from you today, Mr. President, and those conveyed by the delegations of our brotherly and friendly countries are highly appreciated in these dark moments. We would like also to thank all of our brothers and sisters who have expressed noble feelings of love and sympathy. We hope that God Almighty will guarantee your health, Mr. President, and we wish you and your country every success. May our dear President be blessed with God's mercy. The Syrian people, bereaved by this great tragedy, hope that he will rest in peace. I should now like to move on to the second part of my statement. Mr. President, the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic would like to express to you our sincere congratulations on your outstanding success in undertaking this noble mission. The Syrian delegation would like also to express the highest appreciation to the members of the Bureau and to Ms. Christine Kapalata, Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee, which laid the groundwork for the success of this special session of the General Assembly. We would be remiss if we failed to express to Ms. Angela King and her dedicated staff our appreciation for their effective contribution, which has enabled the work of our session to be crowned with success. We should not forget the coordinators of the working groups, who chaired the informal negotiations. Our thanks go to them for the strenuous efforts they made. There are others whom we should thank as well: the interpreters, our unknown soldiers, and our translators. We would also like to thank wholeheartedly the non-governmental organizations, which effectively contributed to the success of our conference. **22 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** We express our pleasure at the adoption of the outcome

document after arduous but very constructive and fruitful negotiations. Delegations negotiated with a very high sense of responsibility. The delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic, like many others, contributed effectively to those negotiations. This is a great opportunity indeed for us to pay tribute to the positive results achieved by the General Assembly at this special session, which reflect our great will and determination to follow up the Beijing Platform for Action. The Syrian Arab Republic agrees with the ideas expressed in the outcome document and reiterates its commitment to implementing it in conformity with our Constitution, national legislation and social, cultural and spiritual values and traditions. We do so in full consideration of the need for full respect for our national sovereignty and laws in the context of paragraph 2 of the document and of the aforesaid values and traditions. We hope that, by acting in this manner, we will be engaging in a serious follow-up of the Platform for Action, raising and promoting the status of women and empowering them politically, socially and economically, so that they may contribute effectively to the achievement of progress at the national and regional levels. We also hope that we will thus be contributing to the advancement of women regionally and globally in the framework of the strategy set for us by our steadfast leader, the late President Hafez Al-Assad, for the promotion of the status of Syrian Arab women. His framework is a scientific and forward-looking approach to the advancement of women. In conclusion, the delegation of the Syrian Arab Republic kindly requests that its statement be reflected in the final document of this session.

Tunisia

At the outset I would like to express to the brotherly Syrian delegation our heartfelt condolences on the passing away of President Hafez Al-Assad. May he rest in peace. From God we come and unto Him we return. At the closing of the twenty-third special session, “Women 2000: gender equality, peace and development for the twenty-first century”, we would like to express our thanks to you, Mr. President, and to the Chairperson of the Preparatory Committee for the great efforts made to reach the desired results in order to give impetus to the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action. On behalf of my delegation, I would like to express our satisfaction at the constructive atmosphere in the Ad Hoc Committee which contributed to cooperation between all delegations, in particular with regard to some problems relating to the particular characteristics of each culture. It should be made clear that the fact that those characteristics were taken into consideration in the recommendations does not mean that we are going back on the principles agreed in Beijing. On that basis, we reaffirm our commitment to the Beijing Conference on improving the status of women as an integral part of human rights, taking into consideration respect for our Arab and Islamic concepts. We also confirm our commitment to advancing the rights of women. We will implement all the recommendations emanating from this special session on the basis of the policies of the President of Tunisia, Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, and of the various legislative mechanisms and bodies for achieving full equality and equal opportunities for men and women, in order to foster comprehensive and sustainable development.

United Arab Emirates

We wish to congratulate you, Mr. President, and to congratulate ourselves, on the great achievement of this session and to pay tribute to the spirit of understanding that prevailed during its work. My country's delegation values the great efforts that have led to the outcome document and appreciates the aspirations of those who participated in this session to advance the status of women everywhere. For that reason, we will endeavour to implement everything in this document in accordance with Islamic shariah and our country's Constitution and national laws. We would like this statement to be reflected in the final report.

United States of America

On behalf of my delegation and of the United States Mission to the United Nations, I would like to express condolences to the Syrian delegation and to the Syrian people on the death of President Al-Assad. The United States is pleased to join consensus on the draft document before us, which represents an important milestone in the international community's efforts to promote the advancement of women. The United States has submitted to the Secretariat a written interpretive statement that we request be included in the proceedings of this conference; in part, our consensus is based thereon. The United States understands that, as with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, any commitments referred to in the draft outcome document for further actions and initiatives to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action attributed to States are, unless such States indicate to the contrary, not legally binding, and that they consist of recommendations concerning how States can and should promote the objectives of the Conference. Therefore, those references to commitments constitute a general commitment to undertake meaningful implementation of the recommendations overall, rather than a specific commitment to implement each element thereof. Further, the United States wishes to emphasize that only States parties are obligated to implement treaties. In the context of the Beijing Platform for Action, there are certain key issues directly connected to issues of gender and the furtherance of women's rights. In particular, the United States Government has a firm policy of non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and considers that the omission of such a position from the draft outcome document in no way justifies such discrimination in any country. In addition, the United States fully supports the call in the Platform for Action for Governments to recognize and address the health impact of unsafe abortions. We regret that little progress has been made. Since Beijing, nearly 400,000 women have died unnecessarily from unsafe abortion. Even where abortion is legal under certain circumstances, too many countries have not yet trained and equipped health care providers; nor have they taken other measures to ensure that abortions are safe and accessible or to safeguard women's health. We are heartened and encouraged that actions to address the health impact of unsafe abortions as a major public health concern were specified in the five-year

review of the International Conference on Population and Development. On this very important issue — saving and protecting women's lives and health — the United States will be guided by the consensus language adopted in the report of the General Assembly's 1999 special session on the International Conference on Population and Development + 5 on steps the international community is committed to take to save the lives of women. The United States wishes to draw attention to the fact that a number of institutions, organizations and others have been requested to implement the draft **9 A/S-23/PV.10 (Resumption 1)** outcome document. Nonetheless, Governments alone will adopt the draft political declaration and outcome document. When the draft outcome document mentions the actions these other actors may take, it thereby invites and encourages the suggested actions; it does not, and cannot, require such actions. We understand that references to actions that the media may take are in the nature of suggestions and recommendations. They may not be construed to allow any impingement on the freedom of the press, speech and expression, which are fundamental democratic freedoms. As to the use of the term "foreign occupation", the United States recognizes that human rights violations can and do occur in situations of foreign occupation around the world. Nonetheless, the United States continues to have reservations, as it did at the World Conference on Human Rights, held at Vienna in 1993, about any implication that foreign occupation is a human rights violation per se. The United States must request that the record of today's proceedings reflect that the United States dissociates itself from the paragraphs in the draft outcome document currently numbered 29, 30 *ter* and 125 (c), dealing with globalization and economic issues, and is generally concerned about the language in the document that deals with those issues. Those paragraphs characterize globalization and debt as significant obstacles to achieving gender equality. It is our view that national Governments bear the primary responsibility for social and economic development and for ensuring equality for women in all walks of life. Most aspects of equality for women have no direct link to international economic and financial issues. The record should show also that the United States dissociates itself from the paragraph currently numbered 133 (m) *bis*, which concerns disarmament. The United States has two concerns with this paragraph. First, the United States disagrees with the paragraph's assertion that the United Nations establishes priorities for disarmament. We believe that establishing priorities for disarmament is the prerogative of Member States of the United Nations. Secondly, the paragraph proposes that resources made available as a result of disarmament activities be allocated to social programmes which benefit women and girls. While the United States strongly supports economic and social development programmes, especially those that promote gender equality, the United States also has a long-standing position of not linking the two distinct issues of disarmament and the predetermined use of resources, if any, realized from disarmament. The United States reiterates, with respect to all references to foreign assistance and official development assistance, that it is not one of the countries that have accepted an "agreed target" for such assistance or have made commitments to fulfil any targets. The United States fully supports the objectives of the outcome document and is willing to work with others to ensure that there is a proper allocation of resources to address the commitments made in that document. However, the United States cannot agree to an increase in funding for matters dealt with in the outcome document, other than in the context of reallocation of existing resources, or unless sources of funding other than

governmental assessments are involved. Finally, the United States notes that many of the issues covered by the outcome document were, of course, covered in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Therefore, the United States understands that the written interpretive statement that it submitted in that connection is applicable, where relevant and appropriate, to the outcome document.

Vanuatu

My delegation and I bring greetings from the Government and the people of Vanuatu, a small nation in the South-West Pacific. Allow me to congratulate Mr. Gurirab on his appointment as President of the General Assembly at this session and the Bureau for the efficient way in which they have been managing this important session throughout this week. It is now five years since we met in Beijing and made our commitment with regard to the implementation of the 12 areas of concern to women and girls around the globe. We are meeting this week to discuss and deliberate on what we have accomplished and to share our experiences, hopes and aspirations. We are reaffirming our commitment to the principles and general framework for the achievement of equality, development and peace as contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, and the Programmes of Action of Copenhagen, Cairo, Barbados and Rio. Vanuatu's primary action after the Beijing Conference was to hold a meeting of governmental and non-governmental organizations to review and reprioritize the Beijing Platform for Action according to our needs and resources and to translate it into simple English. It was then translated to Bislama, the lingua franca, so that the people could understand, and entitled "Working together for women". The Human Poverty Index of Pacific island countries shows Vanuatu to be the third to last of the least developed countries. As such, Vanuatu believes that the key to development and success is education, but because of limited financial and human resources, education in Vanuatu is neither compulsory nor free. Since the Beijing Conference, the number of primary and secondary schools has increased, as has the number of children. However, of the total number of children in primary schools, less than a third find a place in the secondary school and even fewer continue to the tertiary level. Both the Government and nongovernmental organizations have established vocational schools in the various provinces to cater for the needs of drop-outs, or what we call "push-outs", but most of these cater for males. Women need to be better educated and better informed so that they can get out of their current plight. But given that there are 105 languages, excluding dialects, three official languages — English, French and Bislama — that the schools are scattered over some 80 islands, that financial, material and human resources are scarce and that communication is difficult, the need remains. To address the issue of poverty and economic empowerment for women, in 1996 Vanuatu embarked on a microfinance scheme for disadvantaged women. The first 20 women took out their loans in February 1997, with a bank balance of zero. I am pleased to report that by May 2000, the membership had grown to 435 members, with savings of over $3,000. The demand for such schemes is high, but resources are few. A successful nation is a healthy nation. Since the Beijing Conference in 1995, Vanuatu has made some progress in improving the health of women. Infant and maternal mortality has

decreased and life expectancy for women has risen. This has come as the result of cooperative efforts by both governmental and nongovernmental organizations, such as the Vanuatu Family Health Association, the Vanuatu National Council of Women, the Vanuatu Women's Centre and the Vanuatu Society for the Disabled. Vanuatu is fortunate that it is still free from the HIV/AIDS virus. But mosquito-borne diseases such as malaria and dengue fever and other diseases such as cervical and breast cancer need much work and financial and human resources if we are to eradicate them from the country. Because of the rising incidence of domestic violence, in 1992 Vanuatu set up the Women's Centre, with the assistance of the Australian Women in Development Association, to cater for victims of domestic violence. It offers counselling, advice and temporary shelter to victims. It works closely with government departments, the police and the Fiji Crisis Centre to provide community education and training. There has been a decrease in violence in the past three years, but more still needs to be done. In March 1995, Vanuatu ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. A committee consisting of governmental and non-governmental organizations was set up to monitor its progress, and in 1998 a family protection bill was drafted. Among other things, the bill proposes to preserve and promote harmonious relationships, prevent domestic violence at all levels of society, ensure effective legal protection for victims of domestic violence and provide for the punishment of any or all persons who commit acts of domestic violence. Though the draft bill has more publicity awareness workshops and consultations than any other in the history of Vanuatu, the question remains as to whether the 52 members of Parliament, all men, will pass it in the August 2000 parliamentary session. Vanuatu has made some progress in having women in decision-making. We now have women in the posts of Auditor General, Public Prosecutor and Chief Registrar and in eight directorships. We have no women members of Parliament in the current Government, although we had one in the previous Government. The Government embarked on the Comprehensive Reform Programme in June 1997. One of the major issues was gender equality in all spheres of life. Through the Programme, various mechanisms were set up to address this issue. The Department of Women's Affairs became an autonomous department under the portfolio of the Prime Minister. A Gender Planner and Equity Officer were appointed and a public service senior women's network was set up to find ways and means of addressing these imbalances. Nongovernmental organizations have worked together with Government in lobbying various sectors of the community and the public sector at large to effect this change. Women's rights are human rights. Chapter 5 of Vanuatu's Constitution provides for equal treatment under the law. However, the implementation is still far from satisfactory. Through the Government's Comprehensive Reform Programme, the Good Governance Project, the Vanuatu Women In Politics organization and the assistance of the University of the South Pacific, Port Vila centre, we have reviewed Vanuatu's legislation to ensure that it is entirely gender-based. The recommendations for amendments are laid before the authorities concerned. Through the assistance of the Australian Government's overseas aid programme AusAID, Vanuatu has introduced a system in the Institut National Technique de Vanuatu, whereby girls may enter such non-traditional areas as mechanics, electronics, construction and carpentry. The project has still to be reviewed to ascertain its failure or success. In conclusion, I would like to say this on behalf of the women of Vanuatu. The script was written and the stage set in 1946 for the play entitled *The Promotion of Women's Rights.* Fifty-four years later, we are still rehearsing

our respective roles. It is now high time to get up on stage and perform the play. To do this, developing and underdeveloped countries look to the international community of developed nations to ensure that we all know our roles and responsibilities in the play. Vanuatu women's theme is "Partnership for the New Millennium". We would like to extend it to all participants in this special session. Let us all continue to work together for the development of women towards a better standard of living, a better, healthier world and for gender equality, development and peace.

Venezuela

On behalf of the Government of Venezuela, I wish to convey our greetings and delight at the efforts made by the United Nations system in convening this special session, which is so important to the achievement of gender equality. We have attended this special session with the firm goal of reaffirming our commitment to the Platform for Action agreed on at Beijing five years ago. For Venezuela and the rest of Latin America, Beijing was undoubtedly a fundamental landmark for the advancement of gender equality, which we recently reaffirmed in the Lima Consensus, adopted at the eighth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. We wish to share the extraordinary success in our country of the adoption of a Constitution with a gender perspective through a constituent process that took into account the specific needs, rights and aspirations of Venezuelan women. Henceforth in my country, male and female citizens alike will be called on for public service; children's planning will take girls into account as well as boys; chairwomen will preside alongside chairmen; women will work alongside men; and at home, father and mother will enjoy equal importance and equal protections. We are entering the new millennium with a Constitution that is the project of a country with a gender vision and with a leader, President Hugo Chávez Frías, who is deeply committed to it. The Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela protects families, mothers and fathers, establishes the right of couples to decide the number of children they wish to conceive and guarantees them adequate information to ensure the exercise of that right. In Venezuela, we have created the National Institute for Women with a major increase in the allocation of budgetary resources that will help establish the office of Women's Ombudsman envisaged in the Equal Opportunities Act enacted in 1993. Another achievement has been the constitutional recognition of boys and girls as enjoying full rights. Their higher interests and the absolute priority accorded to the formulation of policy for boys and girls were reasserted by the recent entry into force of an organic law to protect children and adolescents. This law stipulates that boys, girls and adolescents have the right to be informed and educated in sexual and reproductive health so that they may engage in sex and parenthood responsibly, healthily, voluntarily and without risk. It also ensures access to high-quality services and programmes for sexual and reproductive health that protect the confidentiality of boys, girls and adolescents. In the context of the reform and restructuring of the health sector, the National Programme for Sexual and Reproductive Health was recently established. Besides institutionalizing national commissions to prevent early pregnancy and to promote breastfeeding, the Programme is also charged with integrating all health programmes so as to guarantee

comprehensive health care to all women. One priority of our Government is the prevention of teenage pregnancy, which has become a public health problem. In order to address this situation, we have drafted the Second National Plan for the Prevention and Care of Early Pregnancy for the period 1999-2004. Health and education have been priorities for President Hugo Chávez. In this respect, our Government has decided to address the adverse effects of globalization that have affected women in particular and led to the feminization of poverty and to a decline of health and education indicators, resulting in high rates of maternal mortality, increased incidence of AIDS among women, breast and cervical cancer and other pathologies that primarily affect poor women. Moreover, within the framework of health care reform, the Bolivarian Constitution stipulates health care as a social right and that the State must guarantee it and universal social security, explicitly including housewives. The latter have been challenged by the growing commercialization of the health care sector in our country, which has resulted in the inaccessibility and deterioration of health-care services, affecting women, girls and boys above all. In Venezuela, we have launched the establishment of a new management model for ambulatory health care, the Comprehensive Health Care Model, which breaks with the practice of dividing the provision of services, promotes preventive action and reduces the number of lost opportunities that have undoubtedly affected women foremost. Our health-care plan also prioritizes the reduction of maternal and infant mortality and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS among girls, boys, adolescents and women, who enjoy priority treatment with anti-retroviral medicine to block the vertical transmission of HIV/AIDS. Most importantly, our plan incorporates education and advice on sexual and reproductive health and the gender equality perspective in school textbooks. With respect to the prevention of violence against women, since 1998 we have had a Law on Violence against Women and the Family that punishes all kinds of family violence, sexual violence and provides machinery for assistance to victims of these situations. Our Institute for Women has also promoted a series of activities in order to disseminate knowledge about the law and to train the different state authorities to implement it. In this respect, some non-governmental organizations have made important efforts in organizing community groups for the prevention of violence against women and in training programmes for the police force and health-care personnel as well as education for the adequate assistance of victims of this serious problem. In Beijing, the Government of Venezuela promised to substantially reduce poverty. The National Institute for Women promoted an employment plan for women, management training for microenterprises, and a strategic alliance with the Bank of the People to develop a credit line for women. In Venezuela, the political participation of women is still an area where much work remains to be done. Even though women have made significant progress in professional training, their participation is still very low when it comes to the highest levels of the executive and legislative power. Our delegation has played an active and committed role in the negotiating process that began earlier this year in order to ensure that the achievements and obstacles, as well as the new challenges that have emerged in the past five years, be reflected in the Platform for Action. Thus, Venezuela has worked arduously in order to define new actions that would make it possible to move forward in the implementation of the Platform for Action and that reaffirm its content. All of this shows our clear commitment to women in Venezuela and the world. On this very important occasion Venezuela urges governments to recognize

the potential of women in achieving gender equality, development and peace in the twenty-first century.

Yemen

It is my honour and pleasure to address the Assembly on behalf of the delegation of my country, the Republic of Yemen, and to convey to you the greetings and thanks of the women of Yemen for all your efforts in preparing and convening this gathering. We look forward at this session to further measures to strengthen the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. We would also like to express our gratitude to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his statement, in which he emphasized the issues of critical concern to women in the fields of education, health, poverty and violence. The Secretary-General also emphasized his concern for women and asserted that women are not just a part of the world, but that they are the foundation of its future. The Secretary-General's statement is indeed a vivid testimony of the high status of women in the world today. We hope to see the issues of critical concern to women among the priorities of the forthcoming Millennium Summit of the General Assembly. Allow me to highlight some of the most significant achievements to have taken place in the lives of Yemeni women since the holding of the Beijing Conference in 1995. Women's issues have acquired greater importance and greater emphasis has been placed on them as a result of the accelerated international fundamental changes that have placed women at the centre of the activities of States and put them in the mainstream of overall development. Yemen has moved towards democracy and a multiparty system with political organizations and parties in civil society and has developed various trade unions, and associations. Non-governmental organizations today play an important role in the follow-up to the Beijing Conference. Among those organizations are the Association of Yemeni Women, the Yemeni Women's Planning Society, the Society for the Economic Empowerment of Women and the Society for the Advancement of Women. Some of those groups are participating in this session. Women participate positively and concretely at all political and economical decision-making levels and take part in elections as both candidates and voters in urban and rural centres, thus fostering participation and true competition. They have also become active members of the executive offices of all the provinces of the Republic. Statistics show that the number of women voters taking part in the 1997 parliamentary elections in Yemen was 1,272,073, as compared to 478,700 in 1993. Recently, the first Yemeni woman ambassador was appointed to the friendly Kingdom of the Netherlands. A number of women have also assumed leading positions in both governmental and non-governmental bodies, as well as in political parties. A department has been established within the central bureau of statistics to deal with gender-based statistics. The National Committee for Women, which was established under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister to prepare for Yemen's participation in the Fourth World Conference on Women, has been reorganized. This attests to the fact that there is a need to continue to implement the Platform. The Committee has been mandated to draw up national policies and strategies in all the critical areas defined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform. It is made up of women representatives from all governmental and nongovernmental sectors. The

Committee has recently drafted the second five-year plan for women, for the period 2000 to 2005, to be included within the Government's five-year plan. Other departments have been established in all ministries to implement strategies and policies on behalf of women. Regarding poverty, the Government of Yemen has redoubled its efforts to address and reduce poverty; it has adopted a number of measures and implemented a number of programmes, including a social safety network, whose main beneficiaries are women. The Government has taken action in the field of education to reduce the high rate of illiteracy among women and to close the gender gap, especially with respect to access to education, through a special strategy for girls. This commenced recently with support from a number of donor countries and international organizations led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The Government has also formulated a strategy for the elimination of illiteracy and for adult education, and has enacted legislation with respect to teachers and teacher training. Here, let **26 A/S-23/PV.10** me recall the old saying: "If you teach a man, you teach one individual; if you teach a woman, you teach a whole generation". Yemen has adopted strategies for the employment and vocational training of women in keeping with the requirements of the labour market. It is to be noted that the constitution and laws of the Republic of Yemen guarantee the equality of men and women in terms of both rights and duties. Turning to the health sector in Yemen, indicators show a considerable improvement in the level of health care for women, a reduced rate of maternal mortality, improved disease-control, reduced fertility rates and an increased use of contraception. Having outlined the achievements we have made, I must also mention the obstacles that we are facing and that continue to impede the advancement of women in all fields. Some of these are institutional, others are geographic or social. Studies of schools and health-care facilities have shown that there is inadequate coverage in remote population centres and that there is a paucity of women teachers and healthcare providers. Among the difficulties hindering the work of women in rural areas is scattered population and the lack of infrastructure, such as roads. The lack of water resources also affects development and the advancement of women, as well as the ability of women to acquire and store water to meet the minimal needs of families. Let me recall that Yemen is host to a large number of refugees, most of whom are women and children who have been obliged by war and armed conflict in the Horn of Africa to endure difficult social, health and psychological conditions. In spite of our limited means and the economic hardships we are facing, the Government of my country is providing all necessary social and health-care services and shelter for those refugees, although those services may not be optimal. We must emphasize also the need to take all appropriate measures to alleviate the suffering of women and girls living under occupation, embargo or blockade. We convey our deep gratitude to donor countries, to international organizations and to all other contributors to programmes for the advancement of women and, in particular, for comprehensive development. Here we wish to single out the Government of the friendly Kingdom of the Netherlands for its support for our women's unit in our efforts to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

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